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THE
VICAR'S GOVERNESS.

THE
VICAR'S GOVERNESS.

A Nobel.

BY

DORA RUSSELL,

AUTHOR OF "THE MINER'S OATH," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

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THE VICAR'S GOVERNESS.

CHAPTER I.

A 'NEW HOME.

IN London, one hot, dusty afternoon, in the beginning of September, 1870, a pale, wearied looking, but handsome young woman, entered a certain register office for governesses, in Berners Street, and sat languidly down on a chair near the door, to wait till its manager was disengaged, and could speak to her.

A voluble, black-eyed Frenchwoman was standing before the desk in the middle of the room as she went in, telling, in indifferent English, a long story of her "misère" in her last situation; but she turned sharply round as the new-comer entered, and at once addressed her.

"Ah! Mademoiselle Williams," she said, "so you have again returned? I fear, then, your applications have, like my own, been in vain?"

"As usual," answered the pale young woman who had just come in, with a very sorrowful smile. "It is, indeed, weary work."

"It is horrible!—detestable!" said mademoiselle, with a shrug of her angular shoulders. "And you Anglais are so—what is the word?—so brusque, so cold. As I was telling madame here, I consider the obligation is mutual between gouvernante and pupille; but the parents—the guardians—do not seem to recognise this truth. Just consider, mademoiselle, in my last appointment, Madame Barlow wished me to be sempstress as well as instructress! All her old costumes had to be remodelled—all her old skirts made into new; and then, oh, Ciel! her taste was detestable."

"Well, she paid a compliment to you, mademoiselle, at any rate, when she consulted you," said the manager of the register office, from behind the desk. "What do you say, Miss Williams?"

"I—I—do not know, I am sure," replied Miss Williams. "I scarcely know what governesses are expected to do."

"You look tired," said the manager, with a touch of pity in her voice, looking keenly through her spectacles for a moment or two at Miss Williams's face. "You really look very tired."

I am sure I wish we could get you comfortably settled."

A grey, worn woman was this manager. Fifty years of a hard, poor life were written in fifty lines round her pale blue lips, and graved in fifty more on her wrinkled brow. What troubles, what disappointments had been hers; yet her heart felt kindly still sometimes, and she had grown sorry of late for this delicate, handsome-looking woman, who came to her so often, and always seemed so nervous and so sad.

"You must keep up your heart," she continued, addressing Miss Williams. "There is always a good deal of difficulty about a first situation. There's mademoiselle, now," she added, with a smile, "she doesn't mind refusals, or anything else."

"Bah! why should I, madame?" said the Frenchwoman, with a significant shrug. "I give my work, they give me their money. Where is the obligation? And if we do not suit each other—well, we part. What can be more simple?"

"Well, Lady Cranley's housekeeper will be in town to-day, mademoiselle," said the manager, returning to business; "and I advise you to apply at once. You know the address," she went on, "and I will be glad, when you have seen her, to hear what she says."

"Certainly, madame ; and as Mademoiselle Williams is here I will, with your permission, now take my leave. Mademoiselle, I wish you every success. Madame, I will at once let you know the result of my application ;" and then, with a smile and a bow, the Frenchwoman vanished.

"She's a cool one," said the manager, looking after her. "You should try to get a little of her assurance, Miss Williams."

"I am afraid I will never do that," answered Miss Williams, shaking her head.

"And so you tried at all the five addresses I gave you?" continued the manager, taking off her spectacles, and giving them a rub. "All the five—and without any result?"

"I got nearly the same answer from them all, I think," said Miss Williams. "I was not suitable, that was all ; it is really very disheartening."

"I'm afraid you are too pretty for a governess," said the manager, smiling. "Ladies, you see, don't like——"

"I am sure I would do them no harm," said Miss Williams, with a heavy sigh.

"I daresay, I daresay ; but ladies don't like, especially if there are young men in the house, to have good-looking governesses. But I have a letter here ; a letter I received this morning, which says nothing about a personal interview ;

and indeed"—and here the manager referred to a letter lying on her desk—"she lives too far north to expect one, if she wishes to have a south-country governess for her children. It is from a clergyman's wife—from Mrs. Manners, of NARBROUGH Vicarage, North Northumberland, and I think seems a fair offer. Would you like to try it?"

"If you think I have any chance," answered Miss Williams. "I would—I would much rather leave London;" and her face flushed slightly as she spoke.

"Well, this lady leaves it a good deal in my hands," said the manager. "All she requests are respectable references, and a suitable person. It is a good offer as things go. Let me see—four little girls, music, French, and English expected—forty pounds a year. Yes, I consider it a fair offer; and you have the reference to that Col. Ross you mentioned, and to his wife, and her sister in England, all right, I suppose?"

"Yes, they are all right," said Miss Williams. "Here is Mrs. Ross's," and she drew out from the pocket of her dress a letter, written on foreign paper, and without any address on the envelope, and handed it to the manager, who opened it, and read it attentively over.

"I see she says you resided with them some

time," went on the manager, after she had concluded its perusal; "but as they were proceeding to India she was afraid the climate would not suit you; and her sister, Miss Garwood, of Willstone Rectory, in Shropshire, will, if necessary, act as a further reference to you now that she has left England. Well, it is very satisfactory; and as Miss Garwood is a clergyman's daughter, and this lady in Northumberland is a clergyman's wife, that might be a recommendation. You are an orphan, Mrs. Ross says, and your father was a merchant, who was unfortunate in business, and she has known you for a considerable time. All this is, as I said before, satisfactory; and I think you better apply for the situation at once."

"Must I write then, or will you?" asked Miss Williams.

"I will write to Mrs. Manners," answered the manager, "and enclose Mrs. Ross's letter, and her sister's address; and you had better, perhaps, write also; and I hope that this time you will be more fortunate than you have been before."

"You are very kind, I am sure," said Miss Williams. "How little people know—how little girls know, when they first think of it—the difficulty there is in obtaining a situation, or, indeed, making a livelihood at all."

"That's true enough, at any rate," replied the

manager. "Well, well, in this world we must just do as best we can. If you will sit down I will write my letter now, and then you may as well write yours here. You say you are competent to teach French and music?"

"Yes," said Miss Williams, timidly. "Yes; I think I can do that."

"She is not fit to be a governess," thought the manager, as in her stiff, old-fashioned handwriting she began her letter to Mrs. Manners. "Poor young thing!—poor young thing! one can see by her face that many a trouble has been hers." And then, as she wrote on, the kindly woman looked up once or twice, and glanced curiously at Miss Williams, who was sitting, playing absently with the links of a fine gold chain which she wore as a watch-guard.

"Your father was rich once I suppose?" she said, suddenly; and Miss Williams moved uneasily, and blushed deeply, before she answered the question.

"Yes," she said slowly, after a pause; "yes; poor papa was once very well off."

"I thought so," said the manager, taking off her spectacles with a jerk, and finishing her letter. "I thought so. Your dress, and everything about you shows that. Well, these changes are very hard to bear."

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Williams; and she bit her lips, and turned away her head as she spoke.

"Never mind, my dear," said the manager, good-naturedly; "you don't know what's in store for you yet. You've your life before you still; not like an old woman like me. And excuse me asking if your father used to be rich—but you see, we haven't often governesses coming after situations dressed in a silk that," and she nodded at the rich and elaborately trimmed black silk costume which Miss Williams wore.

"All my dresses are too—too fine, I'm afraid," hesitated Miss Williams; "but I've only those I used to wear, and I cannot afford just now to buy plainer ones."

"Well, pardon me giving you a hint," said the manager, "but I've little doubt it was your smart dress and your pretty face which prevented some of the ladies I sent you to thinking of you; and I advise you to dress as quietly as you can, if you get this situation in Northumberland."

"I can have some of them altered," said Miss Williams. "They are all so much trimmed."

"They look very well, you know," answered the manager: "but—well, well, never mind the smart dress just now. Come and write your letter, and I'll send them both off to the post. I will really

be glad if you get a comfortable and respectable home, like this promises to be."

Miss Williams sat down and wrote her letter, and in a day or two it was duly replied to.

Mrs. Manners, of Narbrough Vicarage, in Northumberland, was so far satisfied with the manager's recommendation, and Mrs. Ross's letter which she had enclosed, that she had written to Mrs. Ross's unmarried sister, the clergyman's daughter in Shropshire, and if this reference was also satisfactory, Mrs. Manners agreed to engage "the young person" the manager had mentioned, on the terms previously proposed.

This was the contents of the first letter, which was written in a clear, firm handwriting, and it was speedily followed by a second.

Miss Garwood's recommendation was also satisfactory, though she explained that she was personally unacquainted with the young lady who was applying for Mrs. Manners' situation; but she had frequently heard of her from her sister, Mrs. Ross, who was in India; also from her brother-in-law, Colonel James Ross, of the 3rd regiment, and she could perfectly depend on the character and respectability of any one whom they had received into their friendship and intimacy.

This letter of Miss Garwood's decided the matter, and the next day the post brought a brief but ex-

plicit note from Narbrough for Miss Williams. In this Mrs. Manners agreed to engage her, and requested her, as soon as possible, to proceed to Northumberland.

"I have nothing to detain me," said Miss Williams, as she handed this note to the manager of the register office, to whom it had been enclosed—"nothing; and I shall be glad to go at once."

She was glad and happy. She said this a hundred times to herself on her lonely journey northward. Glad to leave the dreary London lodging, where for the last two months she had returned each day heart-sick and disappointed. Glad to leave certain fears and great dread which haunted her behind her. "No one will know me in Northumberland," she thought, as she travelled on; "no one I have ever seen before will be there."

But as station after station passed, and her destination drew more near, she naturally grew a little nervous and afraid, and kept speculating and wondering about the new people and the new home, with which she was so soon to become acquainted.

She knew as yet very little or nothing of either of them. The cold brief note which she had received from Mrs. Manners, and those which she had seen addressed to the manager, and the slight knowledge that she had gained from an old "Clergy

List," which she had found lying in her lodgings, being all the information she possessed.

From this list she had learnt the Vicar of Narbrough's name was Arthur; that the living was worth five hundred a year; and that its patron was Sir Hugh Manners, Bart., who probably, therefore, was some relation of her future employer. But this was all that she knew, and her heart beat very fast when the train stopped, about half-past seven o'clock in the evening, at the station that she had marked so carefully in the Railway Guide, and at which she had been directed by Mrs. Manners to leave it.

"Narbrough," shouted the guard; and at Narbrough Miss Williams alighted, and, together with one or two other passengers, got out at the quiet little country station, which is situated in North Northumberland, and is about a mile distant from the Vicarage that was to be her future home.

It was a fine sharp September evening when she arrived, and as she stood a moment on the platform a cold fresh breeze blew on her face. This was a sea breeze, and looking towards the east, she could see a long blue line of ocean, and the village of Narbrough standing close upon the shore.

But she had not much time to make observations, for an elderly grey-haired man-servant, with a blue, pinched, shrewd-looking face, and a shabby

brown livery, almost immediately approached her, and after dubiously scanning her personal appearance for a moment or two, addressed her.

"Are ye the lady," he said, "the governess, that's for down yonder?" and he pointed his thumb over his shoulder as he spoke.

"Yes," answered Miss Williams; "are you Mrs. Manners' servant?"

"Ay, that is the Vicar's ye mean," replied the man, in his drawling Northumbrian accent; "but which are y'r things?" he continued. "The trap's outside, and I may as well ha' them in."

"These," said Miss Williams, pointing out several large, commodious, and very travel-stained looking trunks.

"All them!" exclaimed the old servant, in genuine astonishment; "but ye've a vast o' them, surely. I canna carry all this lot in the waggonette though, for ye see its new; and the master he makes a bonny row if it gets a bit scratched. But I'll speak to the station-master, who's a decent kind o' body, and he'll see to them till the morn, when I'll be up wi' th' cart, and fetch them down."

Miss Williams having agreed to this arrangement, her luggage, with the exception of a small leather trunk, was left in charge of the station-master; and then, by the servant's direction, she followed him across the line of railway, and on the

opposite side found a neat waggonette waiting for her, into which he handed her.

"Ye'll not ha' been in these parts afore, I'm thinking?" he said, after he had seated himself on the driving-seat, and had begun to drive leisurely along the road, turning half round as he addressed her.

"No," answered Miss Williams. "Is it pretty about here?"

"Ye mean the land? Ay, well enough; flattish, and o'er nigh the sea for my fancy. Folks say it's healthy; but I's sure I dinna ken."

"You do not seem to like it much."

"Oh, pretty fair. Ours is only a poor bit place—old-fashioned, and uncommon bad soil o' the garden—and the master, he likes everything o' the best; and, as I tell him, he canna' expect to get things fust rate, like the Hall.

"Who lives at the Hall?" asked Miss Williams.

"Sir Hugh," answered the old man. "Ye canna' see the house fra' the road, but we'll be coming to the gates presently. Ay, it's a fine spot."

"Is it Sir Hugh Manners who lives there?" said the new governess, with some interest in her tone.

"Ay, surely; the master's brother that was—the master's nephew that is. Poor old Sir Hugh came to a sudden end."

"How did it happen?" said Miss Williams.

The man nodded his head in answer, and bent his elbow, and raised his hand to his mouth, as if drinking from some imaginary glass.

"It was just that," he said—"just that, and nought else. A pleasant, free-spoken gentleman, as ever ye met, was Sir Hugh ; always with his jest and his joke, poor man, to the last. Ay, it was a thousand pities, a thousand pities. But, miss," continued the old man, with a sort of grim chuckle, "they call that the Narbrough death down in these parts, so many take to it ; and it's cold, certainly for an excuse, very cold"—and he looked himself thirsty as he spoke. "Among the poor fisher folks a vast do it ; and not much wonder, for in winter time it's freezing on the water. And then the farmer bodies—never a bit sheep or cattle to be sold, but they must wet the bargain. It isn't much matter, maybe, for the like o' them, but a real gentleman like Sir Hugh, ay, it was a bad job. But yon's the Hall gates ; they say there's nought like them in Northumberland ; and there's fine timber there."

As he said this they drove past a very handsome massive stone gateway, with curious cast-iron gates, and a high wall, which apparently enclosed a gentleman's park."

"And young Sir Hugh lives here now?" said Miss Williams.

"Well, seldom. He's a wild chap, that lad. It's too dull down here for th' like o' him; it's only coming and going wi' him. He was down here this fall for the shooting; but he's gone again, I did hear, to some foreign parts."

"Are we far off the Vicarage now?"

"Yon's the lane—Vicar's lane we call it—and yon's the house at th' end on't. We turn in here." Saying which, he left the highway and drove down a long wooded lane, with a hawthorn hedge on each side of it, at the end of which stood the Vicarage.

"Here we are," said the servant. "Hold the reins for a minute, miss;" and he got out of the waggonette as he spoke, and opened a plain, green wooden gate, and then led the horse slowly up a narrow avenue, composed of tall evergreens and stunted trees.

This ended in a small, circular carriage drive, round a plot of grass, with a sun dial in the midst, and then they stopped before the house door.

It was a grey stone house; grey, green, and discoloured with the damp of many winters, and had a curious, sloping stone roof, and a rustic porch, but was made homelike and pleasant by the evident care and attention bestowed on its appearance. The porch, and most of the front of the house, was literally covered with creepers, which

grew in great luxuriance, festooning the upper windows ; while through the lower ones Miss Williams could see the blazing fires and red curtains within, giving to the whole an air of comfort and warmth, very welcome just then to her weary and fast-beating heart.


Almost before they reached the door it was opened—opened by a neat, smiling maid-servant, while close behind her a comely, rosy-cheeked woman, of some forty-five or six years, advanced with outstretched hand to receive her.

“ You are Miss Williams, I suppose ? ” she said.
“ Come in, my dear. I am very glad to see you. ”

She had a kind voice, and the governess felt almost as if she were being welcomed as a friend, instead of going to eat the bread whose bitterness is proverbial.

“ Come into the study, ” went on the lady ; “ the Vicar’s out, and I always tell him, ” she added, with a pleasant laugh, “ that he’s got the snuggest room we have in the house ; and I am sure you must be both tired and cold after your long journey ; ” saying which she led the way into a room which fully justified her commendations, and set her visitor a seat by the fire.

“ You seem very pleasantly situated here, ” said Miss Williams, uncertain how to address her ; for handsome, rosy, and good-tempered looking as she



was, she certainly seemed very unlike the wife of a Vicar, and the sister-in-law of a baronet.

"Yes, it is a nice place," answered the lady, her beaming face beaming yet more brightly as she spoke; "and I can find no fault with it; but then you see it's my home, and the children have been all born here," she added, humbly; "so it may seem different to a stranger."

"I think a stranger would be very hard to please who did not like it," said Miss Williams, who had come to the conclusion during this last speech that this must be the mistress of the house.

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Manners, for she was indeed the Vicar of Narbrough's wife. "I haven't been much about. Adelaide complains of it sadly. She says coming to Narbrough is like being buried alive. But I'm sure I never find it dull. I'm always behindhand with my work," she continued, with her good-natured laugh, "so I've no time to be dull. Besides, how any one can be dull I can't think, with all the children—God bless them!—laughing and running about the house."

"Is—is Miss Adelaide one of your daughters?" asked Miss Williams.

"Oh no, not mine. Adelaide is the Vicar's eldest daughter by his first wife. She is—well, she is very unlike the others. But sit to the table, my

dear. You see I have the tea laid out ready for you, and I hear Jane bringing up the kettle and the ham and eggs; and I am sure I hope you will make a hearty tea."

All through this meal Mrs. Manners chatted on after the same simple fashion; telling Miss Williams little bits of family history, intermingled with receipts for cookery, and other small household details, at the same time showing the kindest attention to the comforts of her guest.

"Do take a little more—just a little," she urged with old-fashioned hospitality. "Eh! but we must have you look a little stouter and rosier before you have been with us a month, or you'll do no credit to the house. But the fine air here is sure to give you a colour, and I like to see young people with a colour; all my little ones have it but Milly," and Mrs. Manners sighed as she mentioned the name.

"Is Milly delicate?" said Miss Williams.

"She pines like. I don't know how it is. But d'ye hear them? They're all outside in the passage, waiting to see you, but I told them you were to have your tea in peace before they came in; but if you are really finished I'll open the door, for they've been in a fine state all day, poor things, thinking about you coming."

As Mrs. Manners said this, she crossed the room

and opened the door, and three fair heads, of different sizes, but very much the same colour, all at once peeped in.

“Come in now, and behave yourselves like good children,” said Mrs. Manners, addressing her little girls, who still hung shyly back. “Come, Katie, you are the eldest, and should be able to teach the little ones manners; and you are getting to be a great girl now too. She’s near twelve, Miss Williams, but they tell me you’ll find her sadly backward. Well, Dolly, you come then. Dolly is the second, and she is eleven, and not so shy as the others. The Vicar called her Dolly after her grand-aunt, Miss Dorothy Fenwicke, because he thought she would leave her a legacy if he did; but when she died, poor lady, we found that she hadn’t; but perhaps it’s as well, for now they are all alike. And this,” she continued, with the fondest pride visible in her voice and manner, and lifting up in her arms as she spoke a lovely little girl of six, who had run to her and hid her face in her dress, this is Bonny. She’s the darling, the youngest. Papa called her Bonny first, because she’s his pet, and now we know her by no other name.”

They were all of the same type. Rosy, blooming, fair-haired girls, with small straight features, and the mother’s bright blue eyes, but Bonny was the rosiest and the bluest-eyed of them all.

"But where is Milly?" said Mrs. Manners, looking anxiously round.

"She's lying on the sofa, ma, in the dining-room, reading the last book Georgie brought her. She would not come, she was frightened," answered Dolly, in a sharp pert voice.

"Well, you'll see her afterwards. She's not like the rest, Miss Williams," said Mrs. Manners, with an indescribable sadness stealing for a moment over her usual happy face. "She cannot run about as they do. But what am I thinking of, my dear?" she continued, "keeping you standing here all night talking of the children, when you must be so tired with your long journey. You'll see them all in the morning, and have enough of them too, I'm afraid. But come up now, and I'll show you your room."

Miss Williams accordingly followed Mrs. Manners up a broad old-fashioned staircase, neatly carpeted, and into a small but exceedingly comfortable looking bedroom.

"I hope you'll find everything that you want," said the kindly hostess, looking round, "but if you don't, be sure you ring and ask for it; and you must not let the children in to tease you; and I trust, my dear, you'll soon feel quite at home among us."

"Thank you—you are very kind," said Miss

Williams, and her eyes grew moist as she spoke, at all this unexpected kindness.

"I'm a very homely woman, you know," went on Mrs. Manners, with an uneasy little laugh; "but I daresay that wont stand in our way if we try to make each other comfortable; but I'll leave you now, and when you feel inclined you must find your way down to the study again."

For long after Mrs. Manners left her Miss Williams sat silent and absorbed. Of what was she thinking during that first hour in her new home? No girlish dreams and hopes at any rate were drifting through her mind, for with a shivering shudder she at last roused herself from that long reverie, and went slowly to arrange her dress before the glass.

She was very pretty; of this there could be little doubt, for it was a face which had a beauty beyond mere regularity of feature and outline, and a pair of eyes which would have made a plain woman seem almost handsome. But she looked a little worn, and the expression of her face was not a happy one. Still it was attractive, and when she reappeared downstairs, Mrs. Manners, who was sitting in the study waiting for her, could not conceal her admiration, and openly complimented her, in her simple way, on her beauty and her dress.

A long and pleasant conversation then passed

between them, during which Mrs. Manners told Miss Williams much of their family history, though she received very little information in return. But they were mutually pleased with each other ; and after Miss Williams had retired for the night, Mrs. Manners no sooner heard the sound of carriage wheels in the garden, than she ran into the hall to meet her husband, who had been out dining in the neighbourhood, and began at once to praise the new inmate.

"Oh, Arthur," she said to the Vicar, as he stood shaking the wet off his outer coat, for it had been a sharp shower during his drive home, "the governess is come, and she's so pretty and so pleasant ; the children are delighted with her, and so am I."

"You'll be jealous of her presently, my dear, if she's such a paragon," said the jovial Vicar, patting his comely wife under her white round chin. "Well, well, never mind her just now. I hope, like a good woman, you have the kettle boiling, for I can tell you that this confoundedly wet drive has made me feel most uncommonly chill."





CHAPTER II.

THE MANNERS.

THE Rev. Arthur Manners, Vicar of Narbrough, had, as his second wife had told her new governess, been married twice. The first Mrs. Manners had been a cousin of his own, a Manners also, and her only sister had married his brother, Sir Hugh Manners, who was then the head of their house ; so then there was a double connexion between the Vicarage and the Hall.

The two sisters, the Baronet's lady and the Vicar's wife, had always been on good terms with each other, for there had been much affection and little jealousy between them, and their children had grown up together as friends and playmates.

Lady Manners had two sons, and her sister at the Vicarage a son and a daughter ; therefore, after her mother's untimely death, the little Adelaide had naturally felt for her aunt almost the same affection as she had given to her own dead parent, and had lived at the Hall during Lady Manners' lifetime, and that of her uncle, Sir Hugh.

The first Mrs. Manners' death was very sudden, and occurred when Sir Hugh and Lady Manners happened to be abroad. The poor lady had gone out one chilly day in autumn insufficiently clad, and had caught a terrible cold, which ended in inflammation of the lungs; and, after a few days of severe suffering, in her death.

The Vicar was quite stunned at first with the suddenness of his loss. He had never dreamt of danger, and had had his laugh and his jest at the dead woman but a few hours before she was gone. She had, in truth, been one of those who are always complaining; and the Vicar had learnt to hear of her ailments without disturbing his composure; and he now reproached himself for his want of feeling and discernment, and, besides, had that horror of death which those who never think of it generally feel.

The person who comforted the motherless children best—who sat by them in bed, and told them not to cry, “that mamma was far better off now,” “that she was an angel in heaven, and that if they were good they would go to her some day”—was a certain Nelly Dobson, the housemaid of the establishment, and only before remarkable for being very pretty, and rather disorderly.

This good-natured creature, however, now became a blessing to them all in their sudden

affliction, for she had that gift of sympathy which, wrap ourselves up in our pride as we may, we all feel the want of in the first dark days of grief and bereavement. Nelly comforted the children, and she comforted the Vicar also. If she spread jam on their bread and butter, and roasted them apples, she also mixed his whisky toddy a little stronger than usual; talked to him in her homely fashion, and cheered him in his loneliness and sorrow.

Had any one hinted this to the Vicar three months after his wife's death he would have scorned the insinuation. He believed himself to be still sincerely mourning for the dead woman, and so perhaps, in some sort of way, he was. But we are strange creatures, and he was already getting rather jealous of a good-looking young fisherman who "came after" pretty Nelly; and he grew "awfully particular," so his handsome housemaid informed her lover, at this time about having the back door locked in early, and had the keys (not after his usual careless fashion) brought in each evening, and laid on the dining-room table. He "was going to have no idle scamps hanging about the place," he said; and Nelly began to wonder what was coming over the good-natured "master."

Things went on pretty much in the same way for another six months. Lady Manners came home, and the children went up daily with their

nursemaid to the Hall. Then gradually—little by little—the parson and his pretty housemaid began to be talked about. The nurse tossed up her head one day, and said to the housekeeper at the Hall—

“We could not come before, as Nelly wanted the children for something or other, and must needs be obeyed. Nelly, indeed! set her up with her airs and her graces, that one should have to run after her! It's a little *too much*, isn't it? I would like to know *who* gave her the fine brooch she sports, and the blue silk. I shouldn't wonder—well, I'll say no more. Those who live longest see the most, they say; but if I was my lady, I'd send her packing in double quick time.”

These things came to my lady's ears after awhile, but she was too haughty a woman to pay much attention to such reports.

“They talk about your brother and some girl down at the Vicarage, Hugh,” at last she said to her husband. “Had you not better speak to him about it?”

The jolly red-faced Baronet burst into a horse-laugh at his lady's information.

“What geese you women are,” he said, “and what a fuss you make about things! Arthur likes a pretty girl as we all do; it's in the family, my lady. But leave him alone. He isn't such a fool.”

Sir Hugh meant he was not such a fool as to marry her, and the whole countryside said the same thing.

This universal opinion was not long, we may be sure, in reaching pretty Nelly herself. But she was a good girl, and had had a good mother, and therefore did not care much about their gossip ; yet she acted on it.

"Master, I am going to leave you," she said one night to the Vicar, after she had lit his pipe and stirred the fire, turning away her head as she spoke.

"What the deuce d'ye mean by that, Nelly?" said he, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and staring at his handsome housemaid.

"Just what I say," answered Nelly. "Folks are talking about you and me, and although they have no call, I don't mind giving the occasion ; so I'm going away."

The parson put his pipe back into his mouth, and puffed vigorously for a few minutes.

"Why d'ye mind such meddlesome fools?" he said at length.

"An honest girl minds her good name," said Nelly, with a tear gathering in her bright blue eye.

"Where will you go?" asked the Vicar, after another pause.

"Home first," replied the girl, hesitating; "and then, maybe——"

"What then?" said the Rev. Arthur Manners.

"Perhaps—I'll get wed."

"What! to that idle scoundrel Jim Robinson?" said the Vicar, rising in great wrath. "Nelly, are you such a fool as that?—such an idiot? You know he's a worthless fellow—a bad character."

"I know nought about it," replied Nelly, with some spirit. "But I know he loves me well, poor fellow, and would marry me to-morrow."

Upon this hint he spoke—

"I know other fools who would do that too, Nelly, rather than lose thee, I think," half groaned the Vicar. "Sit down, my lassie, and we'll talk it over."

So it was brought about; and some ten days after this conversation, Ellenor Dobson, of the parish of Narbrough, was married in the village church to Arthur Manners, Vicar of the same.

Lady Manners was furious, and wrote such a letter to the Vicar while on his wedding tour, that he never forgave it.

"SIR," she addressed him—"Since you have chosen to disgrace yourself by such a marriage as you have made, I have taken my dead sister's children

away from the pollution and misery of a home like yours cannot fail to be in future.

“ELIZABETH MANNERS.”

The Vicar, however, was not behindhand.

“MADAM,” he wrote in reply—“I have married a respectable woman, which is more than can be said of most of your class; and I mean to have back my own children, as I do not choose Adelaide to be brought up quite such a fool as yourself.

“ARTHUR MANNERS.”

The little Adelaide, however, positively refused to leave her aunt. She cried and screamed and kicked, by turns, when attempts were made to remove her after her father's return to the Vicarage; and at last it ended in the Baronet himself going on a peace-making visit to his brother.

“Why, old fellow,” he said, in his jolly way, “so you've stolen a march on us. Ah, Arthur, you're a sly dog. What! you had an eye for a pretty lass, had you? Well, well, no harm in that; and don't you mind all the stiff-backed nonsense my lady wrote you. You see, the women were sure to be angry.”

“Elizabeth insulted me,” said the Vicar, stiffly.

The Baronet laughed.

“I'm a bit used to that,” he said, shrugging his

shoulders. "Besides, it strikes me, old lad, you paid her back in her own coin. But about little Addy? The child wont leave her aunt; and till this blows over awhile, hadn't you better let her stay?"

"Nelly is a good girl," said the Vicar, "and I'm not ashamed of her."

"I don't doubt it, I don't doubt it! But come, Arthur, don't vex the little girl. You see Elizabeth naturally wishes to have poor Ann's child near her, and by-and-by it will be all right."

It was settled after this amicably enough. Adelaide was to live with her aunt for the present, and George, the son, was to return to the Vicarage; but the Baronet gladly offered to his young nephew the same advantages as his own boys enjoyed, and for many years George Manners went daily up to the Hall to be instructed by the various tutors who superintended the education of his cousins Walter and Hugh.

Thus the young Manners of both families were always together, and as time went on, and blooming children were born at the Vicarage, the Vicar ceased to wish that his eldest daughter should return to him; conscious, perhaps, that a well-bred woman like Lady Manners would be a better chaperone for a young lady who had her way to make in the world than his good-natured Nelly. But terrible

changes, which none of them foresaw, were looming in the distance, and Adelaide, through these unfortunate circumstances, had been compelled to return to her father's house.

The first great break which occurred among them was when the three young men went together to college.

Lady Manners, in her fond maternal pride, had up to this time positively resisted sending her darling boys to any public school ; so one unfortunate private tutor after the other had been badgered and tormented by the unruly young Manners. But even she could not deny the advantage of a college education ; and, though unwillingly, at last gave her consent that they should go, and the three young men started together for Cambridge, where, unprepared by the experience of any great school, they only too readily fell into every temptation and expensive amusement which was offered to them.

They had a disastrous career. In his second year Walter, the heir, was publicly expelled for some open violation of the college rules ; and Hugh, the second son, indignant at the treatment which his brother had received, left Cambridge without attempting to pass his examination, and was by his own wish transferred to Sandhurst, from whence in due time he entered the army, and joined a regi-

ment of infantry, which shortly afterwards was ordered to India.

Meanwhile the proud and unruly young heir had positively refused to return to Narbrough after his disgrace. He went up to town, and joined there the fastest of fast sets; living such a life, that even the faint whispers of his exploits which reached home served to fill his mother's heart with the direst apprehensions, and drove the poor Baronet yet deeper into that fatal infatuation, which ultimately clouded his intellects and caused his death.

Amid all Lady Manners' anxiety, however, she continued conscientiously to do what she considered her duty to her dead sister's child. Adelaide went to all the "county" balls and all the "good houses" in the neighbourhood, escorted by her careful aunt. She had grown up a fine showy girl, without being absolutely handsome. A true Manners, in fact, with the family high regular features, dark eyes, and somewhat sallow complexion. People said she had just missed being a beauty, and wanted a certain softness of expression which would have made her one. But she was not generally admired. The young Northumbrian squires considered her too sharp-tongued and sarcastic to be very agreeable; and though with every wish to attract, Adelaide Manners had had

few lovers ; those who presented themselves being considered both by herself and her aunt as beneath her pretensions.

Thus time went on, and just when she was about twenty-three such news came to Narbrough that Lady Manners was never the same woman any more.

It was "accidental;" so the jury who held the inquest on the two young bodies decided. But how accidental?

"The gentlemen were elevated," one of the witnesses said. Elevated when they started, six of them, on a rowing expedition up the Thames; an expedition from which some of them were fated never to return. They waited till the moon arose before they commenced their homeward journey, and, by this time utterly incapable of managing their boat, trusted themselves on the smooth and shining water.

How it happened the survivors were unable to tell. But an accident occurred, and the boat was upset, and each found himself struggling for his life. Four of them contrived to swim or scramble to the banks, but two were missing, and one of them was the young heir of Narbrough. They did not find his body for two days; not till the weeping mother and half-stupefied father had come to the fatal spot. Then, even as they were standing

by, the men in the boats who were dragging the river, called out they had got one of them ; and Walter Manners, his handsome young face all befouled with mud and slime, was drawn up almost under their very eyes, and laid upon the banks. No wonder Lady Manners sank under it. No wonder the poor Baronet drank ten times deeper than before.

After this there was but little gaiety for Adelaide Manners, for her aunt became a confirmed invalid ; and Sir Hugh cared little for society, excepting that of his boon companions and his brother at the Vicarage. In these latter years, therefore, Adelaide had seen a little more of her father, and something of her stepmother and half-sisters. But she had no fellowship with them ; she belonged to a different class, she said, and thought and considered it an act of duty (something like she did going to church) to call on "poor Mrs. Manners," as she usually named her father's wife. But Lady Manners died about eighteen months after her son's death ; and Sir Hugh, with whom she continued to reside, became daily more unmanageable. She then wrote for her cousin to return from India ; and after some delay, Hugh Manners obeyed her summons and sold out of the army.

He used to come down to Narbrough and stay

with them sometimes during the last six months of the Baronet's life, but lived principally in London, where it was said he was following almost the same career as his unfortunate brother.

When the end of all Sir Hugh's merry nights suddenly came, Adelaide returned to her father's house, and had been its professed inmate for almost a year when Miss Williams arrived; but during this time she had been really very little at the Vicarage. Her aunt's old friends, compassionating her situation, frequently invited her to their country houses; and a Lady Lilbourne, their neighbour and friend of many years' standing, had, during the last season, taken her for a long visit to town, where she had naturally seen much of her cousin, the present Baronet. Thus only for a few weeks at a time had Miss Manners generally remained at her home; and she was absent on a visit to some relatives when Miss Williams first came to Narbrough.

In the meanwhile her brother, George Manners, had been leading a widely different life. Brought up with his wealthy cousins, and liberally supplied with money by his generous uncle, he had never realized in his boyhood or youth how vast was the difference which really lay between his social position and theirs. It was only when startled by Walter's misconduct, and terribly shocked by his

untimely death, that George, breaking through the heavy trammels of bad society and early education, set himself fairly to work, and passed a more than ordinarily creditable examination at the university ; and returned to Narbrough laden with honours and with *debt*.

He could not, of course, long conceal this latter fact from his father ; and when the Vicar forcibly pointed out to him how that, after paying a life insurance yearly for the benefit of his wife, he had barely been able to save four thousand pounds for his five portionless daughters, George first saw his thoughtless conduct in its true light.

It was then that he insisted on declining his uncle's offer of purchasing him a commission in the army, and determined to devote his energies to some pursuit where he would be likely to make money enough to repay his father ; who, at his good wife's earnest entreaty, sacrificed the four thousand pounds to his son's necessities. Deeply touched by this generosity, George at once threw aside the hereditary distaste for "trade," to which he had been brought up, and borrowed of his uncle, Sir Hugh, sufficient means to commence business as a merchant in the town of Old-castle, which is about sixty miles distant from Narbrough ; and through the family solicitor, who resided there, a partner, who also possessed a small

capital, and considerable experience, was provided for him; and hitherto they had been tolerably successful in their undertaking.

Already, indeed, George had been able to repay to the Vicar the sum of one thousand pounds, and had a fair prospect of in another year or so being able to free himself entirely from this galling debt. These honourable and manly struggles had also made him a wiser and a better man. The George Manners of Cambridge—thoughtless, improvident, and clever—was a very different person to the George Manners of Oldcastle—who, quiet, persevering, and energetic, was gradually winning himself a name among the wealthier merchants of the town, as being a steady, industrious man of business, almost certain to rise in his calling, and he was respected amongst them accordingly.

At home he was exceedingly beloved. By his half-sisters he was spoilt to his heart's content, and his stepmother regarded him with peculiar affection. He was the one member of the family who had always treated her with the tenderest respect. Perhaps an illness in his boyhood, through which she had nursed him with the greatest devotion, tended to endear her to him. Be this as it may, George had invariably been the champion at the Hall, and the companion at the Vicarage of his

lowly-born stepmother, and the greatest affection had ever existed between them.

The Vicar now also regarded him with considerable respect. This feeling, however, might properly be dated to have arisen since the repayment of the thousand pounds with interest, and the prospect which he now had of one day seeing the other three thousand also safely returned to him. Before this, Mr. Manners, in spite of his own marriage with so humble a person as his handsome Nelly, had secretly in his heart despised his son, for preferring to make an honourable endeavour to save his sisters from dependence by his own exertions, to a soldier's life of idleness and ease.

The old hereditary prejudice was still strong within him, yet he fully admitted the wisdom of having overcome it; and during his son's almost weekly visits to the Vicarage, he always treated him with the greatest consideration. Perhaps he had some vague idea too that when—when a time came he never cared to think of or prepare for, that George would stand by the widow and the orphans. But he was hale and strong. He had time before him, and had no need yet for such gloomy thoughts as these.





CHAPTER III.

GEORGE.

IN a few days Miss Williams felt almost at home at Narbrough. They were all very kind to her, and the children, though wonderfully backward in the way of education for these days, were yet clever and willing to be taught.

Dolly, the second girl, in especial, had quite a fierce desiré for learning, and often puzzled her young governess by the depth and profundity of her questions. In truth, Miss Williams, unaccustomed to tuition, would in many families have been discharged at once as incompetent and useless. She had by no means all the accomplishments she professed to teach at her finger ends; but then there was no one at the Vicarage able to find this out, and a very little French and Italian went a long way with the children. She also played incorrectly, but sang with great sweetness and expression. Her voice was so pure and true, that people were never tired of listening to her simple ballads, and the Vicar was especially charmed with them.

"I have heard so much about you, Miss Williams, last night and this morning, from my wife and the children, that I assure you I pay you a high compliment when I tell you I am not disappointed." Such had been the first salutation she had received from the Vicar of Narbrough. Spoken with the air and manner of a gentleman, and with some of the old-fashioned gallantry of his youth, but rolled out with a broad Northumbrian "burr," and accompanied by a hearty handshake.

A tall, stout, burly man of fifty was the Vicar, with a twinkling grey eye, and a clean-shaven face, and the usual high family nose remarkably developed. He wore the cloth of his profession, but a velveteen shooting-coat would have suited better his well-formed figure. He made no profession of being a religious man, but had gone into the Church as a means of livelihood, and had accepted the family living in exactly the same spirit as he had accepted the five thousand pounds which his father, the old Sir Hugh, had also provided for his younger son. He was sarcastic and clever, and, though he would not admit it, decidedly a bit of a philosopher; that is, he made the best of his life and of his position, and troubled himself very little about other people's concerns, excepting when they chanced to affect his own comfort or pleasure. He was an idle man also, loving his pipe and his ease, and made it no secret

that his sermons were purchased, and his duties a bore. But he was popular—popular among the hearty country squires, who liked the parson's sly jokes and highly-seasoned talk, and invited him to their dinners, their coursing-matches, and their meets. He did not, however, hunt, out of respect to his means of living, but was a famous fisher, and spent many hours daily, when he had the opportunity, at his favourite sport.

Miss Williams soon liked the Vicar. He was always agreeable to every pretty woman he came near ; so he was very agreeable to her. He paid her compliments, and amused her by his humour and discretion. He told her she sang like an angel—but never expected her to believe him ; and forgot himself all his fine speeches the moment after they were made.

As for the children, they were delighted with their new governess, for Miss Williams possessed all the qualities most taking to the young. She was very pretty, and naturally sweet-tempered and obliging, and wished also to win their hearts, and remain in the quiet spot, which seemed like a haven of rest to her after her stormy past. She had, too, a vein of sentimental fancies, which for their benefit she clothed in the most wonderful fairy lore she could invent. For hours she and her four pupils would sit together on the sands, while she

told them tales of lovely mermaids and mermen haunting the twilight shore ; and they would listen in their country walks to hear the harebells ring to summon the fragile inhabitants of the flowers and shells to their midnight dances.

Dolly, indeed, had her doubts about these things, and did not hesitate to express them, but Milly, the delicate little girl, was a firm believer, and once lifted up her large serious eyes to Miss Williams, and caused her a sudden pang of conscience by saying—

“ But, Miss Williams, are fairies like angels ? —like the angels George tells me about, who are ministering spirits, and always about us, ready to put down in God's Book every good thing that we do ? ”

Then Miss Williams was fain to confess that “ George's ” teachings were better than hers, and perhaps more befitting this lovely child, who might so soon be called upon to join that heavenly host.

It was strange how, among the three healthy robust ones, who had their quarrels, their fits of temper, and their jealousies, as high-spirited children will, that none of them ever felt any of these things to Milly. She was as one set apart, as it were—the little peace-maker and love-maker to them all, and her beauty was equally remarkable. She was like the rest, yet unlike them. Instead of their brilliant colour, her complexion was as pure

as a white rose, while her features were more regular, and her expression more touching and refined. But ah! what anxious eyes followed her. If she were a shade more white and feeble than usual, Miss Williams could see Mrs. Manners' ruddy cheek suddenly grow pale, and a dim foreboding—a shadow which the poor mother vainly would not see—haunted sometimes the happy Vicarage fireside.

There were no lessons after the early one o'clock dinner, Mrs. Manners having declared from the first that from nine to twelve "was enough of it for them all;" and they therefore generally spent the most of the afternoon upon the shore.

The long blue line of ocean which Miss Williams had seen on her arrival at Narbrough station, stretched out for miles and miles distant in view from the Vicarage windows, the sands not being more than a quarter of a mile from the house; and the children's favourite playground was the long, low sandy "links" which you have to cross before reaching them. These hills are infested by rabbits, the vain pursuit of which served as a constant amusement to them; and there for many hours daily Miss Williams and her pupils were almost sure to be found.

Lying to the left, close upon the sea, stands the village of Narbrough. This is almost entirely in-

habited by a fishing population, and is dirty and disorderly in the extreme. Mrs. Manners had warned Miss Williams to go near it as little as possible, as ague and fever were too often rife in its miserable cabins. But they frequently encountered the men and women in their walks, who had all a smile and a nod ready for the Vicar's children ; who, strange as it may seem, was by no means unpopular among the poor. It is true he never refused them help, and had his jest and his laugh with every woman, old and young, in the neighbourhood, and was always ready with his sixpence for a "glass" when applied for ; but he was also, they considered, above some of the common prejudices of his cloth. This with him really arose from indifference, but by them it was regarded as the truest charity.

For instance, when famine, that terrible visitor, two years before Miss Williams' arrival, had stalked in among them during the bitter winter weather ; and long-continued storms and ruinous disasters to their boats and fishing-nets had reduced them almost to absolute starvation, Mr. Manners had collected a considerable sum of money for their relief ; which, contrary to the advice and practice of some of the neighbouring clergy, he gave indiscriminately to church-goers and Sabbath-breakers, to Methodists and Romanists alike.

"All creeds can starve, I suppose," he said, on some remonstrance being made to him; and the "Parson," as he was called, made many friends during this dismal time.

His wife also had greatly exerted herself, and soup had been ready at the Vicarage for all who came for it; so the "Parson's" short-comings were forgotten, and he was almost universally considered by them "a real gentleman, and none of your stuck-up hypocrites."

Some of the fisher people are wonderfully handsome in these parts, the men usually being tall, brown, and stalwart, while among the women you see many a fair and rosy lass. One especially attracted the admiration of Miss Williams. This girl she found, on mentioning her to Mrs. Manners, was well known in the neighbourhood as "Pretty Peggy," and was considered singularly beautiful. She was tall and lithe, with a perfection of form rarely seen; while her clear brown skin, sparkling dark eyes, and delicate features would have made her remarkable in any city in Europe.

The children had formed a kind of acquaintance with her, from her having one day given little Bonny a ride in her creel; and now whenever "Pretty Peggy" came in sight, the child would run towards her, crying to be taken up, and many a ride along the sands the good-natured girl gave

Bonny on her back. Once or twice, on their return from these expeditions, Miss Williams had a little conversation with Peggy, and was struck with the modest sweetness of her manners, as well as her remarkable beauty and grace.

"Cousin Hugh drew her once," Dolly Manners said, one day after they had been talking to this lovely fisher girl; "but he did not make her near pretty enough."

"Is Sir Hugh Manners often at the Hall?" asked Miss Williams, after receiving this piece of information.

"O no," replied Dolly, "not now; only to shoot, and when poor uncle was so ill."

"I wish he would come," said Katie, the eldest girl; "he is such fun."

"But not so nice as George," said Milly, in her gentle voice.

"Of course not," answered Dolly, decidedly; adding, with an air of experience, "who is?"

"George," to the great disappointment of his half-sisters, had not been down to Narbrough during the first three weeks of Miss Williams' residence there. He was in London on business, they told her; but one afternoon, when they were out, he unexpectedly arrived.

Miss Williams was sitting reading on the sand banks, under a green sunshade, with Milly's head

resting against her shoulder, when she heard a simultaneous shout of joy from the three other children, who were scrambling about lower down on the bank, which caused her to look suddenly up.

"It's George," said Milly, rising excitedly; and then Miss Williams saw a tall young man being kissed by his sisters, who were all hanging about him; and presently, lifting Bonny in his arms, he came up the hill towards her.

He took off his hat as he came near.

"I must introduce myself, Miss Williams, I suppose," he said, in a deep but pleasant voice, "as these young ladies do not seem to be inclined to do so."

"I will, if you choose," said the unabashed Dolly; but as they both laughed at this, it made Dolly's offered politeness unnecessary.

"What a glorious day!" said George Manners, putting down Bonny, and seating himself on the grass, and taking off his hat with an air of relief.

"You have just come from town, I suppose?" said Miss Williams.

"Yes; I have all the dust of the journey upon me yet—the dust and the weariness."

Mr. Manners said this in a tired tone, and turned away his face as he spoke, half impatiently, towards the sea; and then Miss Williams looked

at him from under the green sunshade with some curiosity.

He was dark, almost olive-tinted in complexion, with good features, and a certain nobleness of expression, which made him generally considered a handsome man. But it was a clever rather than a perfect face, with some strongly marked lines about the forehead and mouth, characteristic of energy, and also of quick temper and a determined will ; but the forehead was fine, and the eyes soft and dark, and he had a tall, powerful, and well-formed frame.

"How do you like Narbrough?" he said, turning again towards Miss Williams, with a smile.

"He is a very handsome man," she thought, as she looked away.

It was now Mr. Manners' turn to examine his companion, which, however, he did but slightly.

"What a swell she is for a governess!" was his first mental reflection.

"I like Narbrough," said Miss Williams, in answer to his question. "What I have seen of it the country is very pretty, I think, and—though perhaps I should not say it to you—I like Mrs. Manners."

"Our mother is a good woman, isn't she Milly?" said George, stroking his little sister's head ; "a very good woman, Miss Williams. I'm

glad you like her, for she is one of the most unselfish creatures in the world."

"She has been very kind to me," replied Miss Williams.

"She is kind to every one," said George. "And the children, how do you like them?" he added, with a laugh.

"George, you are very rude to ask that when we are here," said Dolly, turning scarlet.

"I admit it, Miss Dolly. I sit corrected. But I was not thinking of grown-up young ladies, like you and Katie here; I was thinking of Milly and this young pickle."

"Georgie pickle himself," said Bonny, who was rolling herself at intervals over her big brother's knee.

"I deny it. Pickle, indeed! I am a middle-aged, sober-minded, steady-going man. Don't believe Bonny, Miss Williams."

"But Willy will," replied Bonny, confidently.

"I see you spoil her, like the rest of us," said George, pulling Bonny up to his face, and kissing her vigorously.

"Don't, George, don't—you scratch—you scratch! You're rough all over your face," cried the child, struggling in his arms.

"Oh Bonny! to say that," said George, releasing her. "Oh cruel Bonny! to hurt my

feelings so deeply. Did it not like its big brother's moustache then against its pretty pink skin? Well, well, never mind—feel in Georgie's pockets, and see what he has got for his little beauty."

With a scream of delight Bonny instantly plunged her hands into each of George's pockets in succession, and produced a tobacco-pouch, a pipe, some fusees, and four separate packets of "sweets."

"All for us?" she asked.

"Yes, all," said George, returning his pipe and his other property back to his pockets. "But don't open them, please, upon my knee. I can't afford to have your sticky little fingers rubbing all over my coat. Here Katie, you take them, and divide them equally; but go to a little distance with them, like good children, and don't fight."

"You never forget them, I see," said Miss Williams, as they all ran after Katie and the packets.

"I'm fond of children—I don't know how it is, I am sure. I suppose because I only see them for a little bit now and then. Are you?"

"Yes," said Miss Williams, laconically.

"I dare say they worry you often enough, the three strong ones? Dolly the most, I should say; but Milly——"

"Oh! every one must love her."

"You feel it, too, then? I sometimes wish she wasn't so—what shall I say?—so angel-like."

"She tells me you often talk to her of these things," said Miss Williams, gently.

"A deep flush came all at once over Mr. Manners' face.

"I—I talk nonsense sometimes, I dare say, Miss Williams," he said quickly. "Yet I should not say that," he continued; "I may have talked to my little sister differently than I should to any one I thought had a long lifetime before them."

The governess was silent for a moment, and then, with sudden excitement in her voice and manner, she said—

"I wish I could—I wish I could teach them to be good and forgive; but I can't—I can't forgive myself. There are some wrongs so cruel, so unjust, that"—then, as she saw Mr. Manners looking at her in evident surprise, she added hastily—"But how foolish of me to talk like this to you, a stranger. I was thinking of—of some—some relations of mine who have injured me—I mean robbed me—at least I think so—of some money."

"These things are very annoying," said Mr. Manners, regarding her gravely.

"Rather more than that, I think," answered Miss Williams, with an uneasy laugh.

"Still, if we look on them aright," Mr. Manners

continued ;—then, checking himself, with a smile he added, “ but it’s all very fine preaching to others, when one happens to be in a very bad humour oneself about pretty much the same thing. I went up to London this time for an especial purpose, and, though I wont say I’ve been robbed, I have certainly lost money I could ill afford to spare just now, by a man’s unbusiness-like conduct. But here is Milly. Well, small child, what have you to say ?”

“ I want to divide my sweets between us three,” said Milly.

“ That’s a generous little woman ! But I’m afraid I am too old to enjoy my share ; but perhaps Miss Williams would like some ?”

“ Well, I should—only one or two, though, Milly,” said Miss Williams.

“ Do you really like sweets ?” asked George Manners.

“ I’m not ashamed to confess it,” answered Miss Williams, with a smile ; “ I really do sometimes.”

“ Then I shall have five children instead of four to remember the next time I come to Narbrough,” said George, with a smile also. “ I shall be ruined, Milly.”

“ What does being ruined mean ?” asked the child.

“ Having no money in one’s pockets, Milly ;

being neglected by one's friends, and despised by one's enemies—in fact, being a person generally avoided and snubbed.”

“That is your definition of being poor, then?” said Miss Williams.

“I fear it is. It is astonishing how one respects the rich man, and how he respects himself. I believe my friend with two hundred a-year generally does me as much good as my friend with two thousand; yet how differently one regards him. Ah, Milly, if I were only a rich man, what a nice fellow I should be.”

“What would you do first?” inquired the little sister.

“I would buy Milly the loveliest dress that ever was seen. What would you wish it to be like?”

“Oh!” said the child, putting her arm round her brother's shoulder, and her face close to his, “Oh! if I might choose—”

“As my being rich is so far off, Milly, I have not the least objection.”

“Well, then, I should like a white dress—a white dress, thin, with golden stars all over, like a fairy; and I should like a golden wand and white satin shoes.”

“Would it cost much, Miss Williams?” said George, with pretended gravity.

"No ; but when could you wear it, Milly ? It would only do for a pantomime."

"Why not have a pantomime at Christmas, then?" said George, "and my Milly would be the beautiful fairy, who comes in at the end to set every one right."

"Oh ! do George—Oh ! Miss Williams, will you ?"

"We'll see about it. What do you say, Miss Williams ?"

"I really don't know what to say, I am sure."

"They always have a child's party on Christmas Eve, and we tried charades once ; but that was when poor Walter was alive. Suppose we really have some sort of pantomime this year, to show off Milly's dress—golden stars and all ?"

"We should ask Mrs. Manners, should we not ?" suggested Miss Williams.

George laughed.

"To be sure," he said, "I forgot all about that ; but"—and he looked at his watch—"it is late, a quarter to six, and I promised my mother to be in at half-past five for my chop ; so if you ladies will do me the honour of walking home with me, we better be moving."

All the way to the Vicarage Milly and her sisters discussed the pantomime, much to the amusement of Miss Williams and George.

“ We wont get out of it now, I expect,” he said at last.

“ Indeed, George, you wont,” said Dolly. “ It will be lovely—such fun, dressing up. Couldn’t we all be fairies, Miss Williams ?”





CHAPTER IV.

AT THE HALL.

GEORGE Manners stayed two days at the Vicarage, leaving by a late train on the Sunday evening following his arrival; and during these two days he was very often with his half-sisters' governess.

Mrs. Manners saw no reason why the "young people," as she called them, should not walk together and enjoy themselves when they had the opportunity. George had always gone about a great deal with his sisters, and why should he not do so now? "It's so pleasant for him, Miss Williams being here," she said to the Vicar, in all simplicity.

"Very, I should say," replied her husband, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders.

"Now, Arthur, don't speak like that," said Mrs. Manners, "for I'm sure it must be. You see old people, like you and me, are no companions for him."

"I'm a younger man than he is, I believe," growled the Vicar.

"My dear, what do you mean by that?—Oh, I see, you think the country air and an idle life keep you fresh."

"Exactly," said Mr. Manners, with a half-comical grin at his own expense. "Our paragon wears himself out a bit by money-making."

"He does look worried, I'm afraid, this time, poor dear. Something vexed him up in London, I think."

"Did he see Hugh there?" asked the Vicar. "I wonder if he said anything to him about coming down."

"He didn't mention it—but, oh Arthur! he's better away," replied Mrs. Manners.

"What folly's up now? Do you think he'll lead your good boy into temptation? Why, Hugh's a year younger than George, isn't he? And let them alone—George can take care of himself."

"I'm not thinking of George," said Mrs. Manners, with some anger in her tone. "I'm not afraid of my boy. George will never be led away by any one, let alone any one who is neither as clever or any thing else as himself; but," she added, with a sigh, "others may."

"What the deuce do you mean? Is it some

woman you're driving at? You don't mean Adelaide, surely?"

"No, no; I sometimes think Adelaide likes him—but——"

"Adelaide likes his prospects well enough, I daresay," sneered the Vicar. "Adelaide wouldn't object to be my lady, I've no doubt; but as for anything else—she's her aunt's own child all over too much for there to be any fear of her losing her heart, except—expediently."

"I don't know; girls' hearts are queer things. It doesn't take much to break them."

"My dear, your nonsense is very refreshing."

"That may be; but, for all that, I hope Sir Hugh will just keep away."

"Who is it you are afraid of? Your two maids are really beyond suspicion, I think."

"Oh Arthur! don't sneer like that. Don't talk in that heartless way. The two girls are good girls, but I don't think Sir Hugh would ever look at them."

"I don't think he would," said the Vicar.

"It's better for poor girls not to be too handsome," went on Mrs. Manners.

"Well, Nelly, your 'girls,' as you call them, are saved that trial."

"Yes, poor things; but they do very well. But I wasn't thinking of them."

"Well, then, who is it? Who has Hugh been making love to? It can't be Miss Williams, for she's never seen him."

"Well, folks say——"

"Women folk, of course."

"It was Alsie Story told me first, and I've grieved about it ever since."

"What did she tell you, woman? Do be quick?"

"You needn't be so sharp, Vicar; there's no need."

"Well, then, my dear Nelly, will you inform me what is the little scandal you have heard, and which you are dying to tell?"

"It's—about Pretty Peggy."

"Whew!" said the Vicar, with a prolonged whistle.

"They say Sir Hugh minds more about meeting Peggy when he's down, than all his dogs and guns."

"Then he's deuced good taste, that's all I can say," said the Vicar. "Peggy Richardson's the bonniest lass between here and Oldcastle."

"She's very pretty; but, oh, Arthur! you should speak to him about it."

"I? Is the woman mad? Why should I interfere with Hugh and his amusements?"

"It's bad to hear you talk, Vicar—very bad; you with daughters of your own, too."

"My dear Nelly, you're a fool."

"Maybe that I am," said Mrs. Manners, her blue eyes filling with tears. "I'm not very wise, I know; not like your folk, but for all that I'd try to save a poor motherless girl if I could."

"I'll have nothing to do with it," said the Vicar. "Most likely it's all nonsense; just some woman's gossip. Hugh's the very man to jest with every pretty girl he comes near, and mean nothing by it. He's a cold selfish young scoundrel as ever I met. Peggy must take care of herself—and leave you women alone for doing that."

"Perhaps George will say something to him, if you wont," said Mrs. Manners, justly offended. But when she went to look for George to speak to him on the subject, she found he was out walking with the "young ladies."

This conversation occurred between the Vicar and his wife, on the Sunday evening that George left Narbrough; and as he did so shortly after he, his sisters, and Miss Williams returned from their walk, Mrs. Manners had no opportunity of saying anything to him in private at all. She, however, consoled herself with the idea that he would probably be home again before Sir Hugh was at all likely to return to the Hall.

In the meanwhile, George Manners himself was making some very wise resolutions.

"She is the nicest, dearest little girl I ever saw," he said to himself, as he travelled in the train towards Oldcastle; "but for all that, I am not going to make a fool of myself."

It was very easy for him to say this, and he doubtless meant it at the time when he did so; but he found it was not quite so easy as he expected to forget the last two pleasant days at home. Never had he felt a week so long in Oldcastle before. Somehow he could not settle to his work again; and visions of the sea, the lonely sands, and a pair of pathetic blue grey eyes, came between him and his ledger, between him and his wits.

"This will not do," he reflected a dozen times a day, when he found his thoughts wandering back to Narbrough. Yet during the next half hour or so, he frequently caught himself reckoning up the time which would elapse before his return, and finally reappeared there on the following Saturday afternoon, in a train which started three hours before the one he usually caught.

But if he felt any excitement about again meeting Miss Williams, he found, to his secret annoyance, that she received him with the most perfect indifference. In fact, she was rather cold to him than otherwise, he thought, and declined to walk with him and the children after service on Sunday morning; saying politely to him, when he proposed to

do so, "Not this morning, I think ; but I will give up my charges to you."

"But do come," urged George.

No, Miss Williams was rather tired, and preferred returning to the Vicarage with Mrs. Manners ; and George and his sisters had by no means a lively walk on the sands.

At the early dinner, also, Mr. Manners felt absolutely cross, because the new governess talked more to his father than himself, though probably it merely was because she happened to be sitting nearer to the Vicar than to him. He talked to Mrs. Manners, indeed, but was listening all the time to what was going on at the other end of the table ; and during the course of conversation he understood Miss Williams to say, she had never yet seen the Hall ; meaning Narbrough Hall, the Vicar's birthplace and early home.

"What !" said George, turning round and addressing her, "do you mean to say you have never yet been over the old place ?"

"No, I have never seen anything but the gates," she answered. "James pointed them out to me the first day I came here."

"Why not go this afternoon then ?" said George. "It's fine, and will be a nice walk. Mother, will you go ?"

"You don't want me, Georgie, to show you the

way," said Mrs. Manners, laughing; "but it will be a pleasant walk for you young ones."

"Well, will you come, Miss Williams?" asked George.

She hesitated a moment before answering him, but Mrs. Manners said—

"Oh yes! my dear; go, if George wants you. Besides, it will be a little change for you, and there's such fine pictures and books there, isn't there, George?"

They accordingly started as soon as dinner was over; the two younger children staying at home with Mrs. Manners, as it was too long a walk for them to take, while Katie and Dolly accompanied their brother and Miss Williams.

George was rather haughty and reserved in his manner at the commencement of their walk. He was resenting what he considered Miss Williams' unnecessary coolness to him, after their previous almost intimate intercourse during his last visit.

"She need not be afraid I am going to make love to her," he thought; so he addressed himself frequently to Katie, loitering behind slightly with his eldest half-sister.

Miss Williams, however, was, or appeared to be, perfectly unconscious of this little bit of acting. She walked on very quietly in front with Dolly, until George, ashamed of his folly, came to her side,

and endeavoured to interest her in the description of some lectures he had been attending during the week in Oldcastle.

"But, perhaps, you don't care for these things?" he asked.

"I have never been in the way of them," replied Miss Williams. "When—before I left home—we cared more about balls and parties, I think, than anything else."

"You lived in a town then?" said George.

"Yes," answered Miss Williams.

"In the south of England?"

"No, in the midland counties. But which way are we going to the Hall, Mr. Manners? You see I know enough already of the geography of the country to know that there are two."

"It's longer by the sands," said George, "but I think pleasanter; but as you will, of course."

"Which way would you like best, Katie and Dolly?" asked Miss Williams of her pupils.

"Oh! by the sands," cried both the girls almost at once; so through a narrow cart-road cut in the links they went down upon the shore.

Katie and Dolly now ran forward, laughing and exhilarated, and George Manners and Miss Williams walked on together almost in silence, while the sea broke with its old solemn cadence almost at their feet.

"That sound makes one sentimental I think," said George at last.

"Or sad," answered his companion.

"Neither of which suits me," said Mr. Manners, looking at her with a smile, "so we better begin to talk, to break the charm."

"The old secret of the sea."

"Yes; you are poetical, I'm afraid, Miss Williams."

"How have you made that wonderful discovery?"

"How can I tell? By that subtle instinct which guides us all more or less, perhaps; besides I must confess——"

"Well, what must you confess? You are getting mysterious."

"That Milly and Bonny have told me——"

"Oh! all our fairy tales. They please the children."

"Here is an old child who will be pleased also, and will gladly listen. Will you begin?—Once upon a time."

"That is an exceedingly old fashioned commencement."

"I beg your pardon. I forgot my superior years. Of course my fairy tales would be quite out of date before yours were invented."

"I do not understand satire, Mr. Manners."

George laughed pleasantly.

"Do you know I think you are getting rather cross," he said.

"Or tired," she answered, stopping; and as she stood a moment there facing him, George thought he had never seen so pretty a woman in his life.

She did at that moment look beautiful. The sea air had given her delicate and expressive face the colour of a wild rose, and the faint lines of care which, when she first came to Narbrough, were sometimes so noticeable, had now almost entirely passed away, and George looked at her with involuntary admiration.

But something else as well as her beauty struck him also, which was the extreme richness and even elegance of her dress. Though, manlike, he did not understand much about its value, still the bright blue satin underskirt which she wore, and the elaborately trimmed upper costume of black silk looped up over it, with her little black hat and blue feather, appeared to him not only wonderfully becoming to her attractive face, but also a very remarkable "get up," as he mentally expressed it, for a poor woman who was earning her bread.

He looked at her so long and so earnestly—partly in admiration and partly in curiosity—that at last she noticed it, and with a slight smile turned away her head. There was, however, none of a

young girl's confusion or consciousness in her manner as she did so. If she saw Mr. Manners admired her, she at least appeared very careless and indifferent about it, and as George's eyes fell, he felt almost as if he had been guilty of an impertinence.

"What is your cousin like?" she said abruptly, as she walked on—"your cousin Sir Hugh."

"Very good-looking; at least he's considered so. He's pale and slight, with a handsome face," answered George.

"He does not live here, then?"

"No, Hugh cannot endure a country life. He's a fast man, Miss Williams, and lives either in London or Paris; but he talks of coming down for a few days at Christmas. He's a strange fellow, Hugh."

"What sort of strange fellow, Mr. Manners?"

"An unbeliever for one thing—an unbeliever, I think, in everything."

"How do you mean?"

"Hugh Manners in his heart will put a bad construction on your simplest action. He thinks there are no such things as innocence or truth; and that honour, self-sacrifice, in fact all man's highest qualities, are alike delusions and folly."

"An amiable character!"

"A strange one at any rate for a man of his age. But he has lived in a bad school. The

worst of both sexes, I think, gather like vultures to prey on a rich young man."

"Your life has been very different, I should think, Mr. Manners?"

"Yes—but I woke up to realize that difference almost too late. It was a bad school for me also being brought up with my rich cousins; but I've got over it now, and have learnt to make pounds, shillings, and pence my highest ambition."

"Do you really like such a life?"

"It is a necessity with me."

"Yes, but I mean from choice?"

George Manners hesitated a moment before he replied to this question, and then he said—

"If you had asked me that a year or two ago, I should have answered no, decidedly no. But I have got used to it, and being forced to work has at least kept me out of many temptations. And I should rather be myself I think, poor trader as I am, than feel as Hugh does—feel that if ever I could afford to have a home of my own, there is not a woman in the world I could respect enough to ask to share it with me."

"Does he really think so ill of women as that?"

"He says so, at all events. He openly—but perhaps we had better drop the subject, for here are the old gates, and we can't well go on abusing

the master when we get inside of them. Well Robert, my man, and how are you?"

This was addressed to an old grey-haired servant, who kept the lodge, and who came eagerly forward to open the gates for them as they drew near; for Miss Williams noticed that all the people about the place seemed to regard "Mr. George" with the greatest cordiality.

"It's a long time since we have seen you, Mr. George," said Robert, as with trembling hands he unlocked the gate and undid the chain; "not since the poor old master's funeral."

"I'm always busy, Robert, I think," answered George; "but you see I've come to see you now, and have brought three young ladies with me."

"It's all sadly changed here," went on the old servant. "D'ye mind when ye comed up every morning, and poor Mr. Walter came down to meet ye, and old Sir Hugh, always with his laugh and his jest?—who would ha' thought it would all end sa soon?"

"Poor Walter!" said George Manners.

"Ay, it was a bad job—a black day, when he ever went fra' home."

"My uncle never quite got over it I think."

"Never—he was never the same man any more. He'd his laugh to the last; but it was not fra' the heart."

"You know about my cousin's death, don't you, Miss Williams?" said George, turning to his companion.

"Yes, Mrs. Manners has told me. It must have been a terrible shock to Lady Manners.

"Terrible, indeed," said George, sadly. "But we must not talk about it. Come up to the house with us, Robert; you can tell this young lady, better than I can, all about the old place."

"There's nought to see now?" said Robert, disconsolately. "Not a horse in the stables, or a dog in the kennels, except a couple of pointers or so. Sir Hugh doesn't care for Narbrough; it's not fast enough for the like o' him."

George smiled as the old man spoke.

"My uncle was a great hunting man, you know, Miss Williams," he said; "it is that which Robert misses so much."

"You should have seen the breakfasts on hunting mornings, miss. Thirty gentlemen in their red coats would ride up this avenue. Mr. George remembers it well. Many's the time I've stood here, with the three ponies for the young gentlemen, and them come out and mount among the best o' them. Ye mind that morning, Mr. George, when ye had the tumble?" and the old man laughed.

George laughed too. "I remember it well, Bob,"

he said. "By Jove! one gets young again when one thinks of these things."

"It was Sir Hugh would have you take it, Mr. George," said Robert, apologetically. "It was his fault, poor man. No one ever got enough at his table, he thought."

"I did that morning, at any rate," said George. "You must know, Miss Williams, that my poor uncle, in his eager hospitality, had given me more champagne than was good for me, and when Robert here hoisted me up, I fell right over the pony's other side."

"But he was better in a minute or two, miss. 'Hold me up Bob,' you said, 'till I get steady;' and before they found the fox, we overtook them, and no one rode better than Master George that day."

"They were jolly times," said George, with a sigh.

"Ay, that they wor; but maybe the young lady would like to notice the laurels? My lady took great pride in them."

They were splendid shrubs; growing nearly up the whole length of the long avenue, and after Miss Williams had sufficiently admired them they went into the house.

"It was thought a noble hall," said old Robert, looking round it, as if some of it had disappeared.

But to Miss Williams, its fine oak carvings, and antique and massive appearance, made it seem very imposing. Stags horns, and other trophies of the chase also adorned it, and George and Robert had a tale about every well remembered "brush," and all their talk now was of some famous and exciting "run."

"You must forgive me," George said at last, coming up to Miss Williams and the girls, who were getting rather tired of listening to stories which had little interest for them; "but the air of the old place has made a boy of me again, I think."

"But it is dull for us standing here so long," said Dolly, impatiently. "Come, George, we want to go over the house."

"What nonsense, Dolly, why do you say that?" said Miss Williams quickly, as a shade of annoyance crossed George's face. "I like to hear your brother and his old friend talk."

"Thank you," said George, "thank you"—and he spoke to her softly, as if he felt she sympathized with his feelings and regret.

After this they went into the dining-room, which was dull and heavy. The faded Turkey carpet, and dark red velvet hangings, looked gloomy enough to anyone, but to George they looked gloomier still. There was the broad mahogany table at which the jolly Baronet had so often sat. The heavy old-

fashioned sideboard which he remembered, but as it were yesterday, laden with shining costly plate. It was all locked away now, and never saw the light ; and with it had disappeared the fun, " the flashes of merriment," the joyous hunting songs, and their wild choruses, which had so often echoed round the room when the old master had been there.

" I remember the day Master Walter was christened," said Robert, solemnly, " and Sir Hugh standing up there to drink his health."

They might well all look grave as the old servant said this, for they were thinking how those wishes " for long life, health, and prosperity," which the proud father had spoken, had ended.

" It was a bad business," said Robert, shaking his grey head—" a bad business."

In the drawing-room also painful reminiscences of the unfortunate young heir were very prominent. As you entered the room a full-length portrait of a handsome young man, in a college cap and gown, on the opposite wall, at once attracted your attention.

" This is poor Walter," said George, going up to it, and looking steadily at his dead cousin's face.

" He was sorely changed fra' that though," said Robert, also looking at his late young master.

" You mean after he was dead ?" asked Miss Williams, almost in a whisper.

"I mean 'afore, miss," answered the old man; "that was taken 'afore Master Walter went to London—'afore he began his wild life there."

"This is my aunt," said George, pointing to the picture of a handsome haughty looking lady which was hanging near. Lady Manners had a well-bred look of repose on her proud face; yet there was a certain expression of anxiety lurking in her dark eyes, and the lines round her mouth, which spoke of some grief, which when this was taken had perhaps faintly foreshadowed that which was to come.

"She never got over it," said Robert. "Yon sight by the river-side just broke my poor Lady's heart."

"He was the pride and hope of her life," said George Manners. "She never cared for Hugh as she did for him."

"Nor any one else either," broke in the old servant. "Poor Mr. Walter had his faults, but they were like his father's, all against himself—but Sir Hugh——"

"You don't seem to care much for my cousin, Robert?" said George.

"I'm an old man, Mr. George, but in my young days young men were young—open, free, and honest like; I dinna' care to see old heads on young shoulders."

George smiled. "Hugh has a cold manner," he said, "but he's honest enough, I hope."

"He's a sneer like that's hard to bear anyhow," answered Robert; "one can't tell whether he means a thing or no;—but he's master now—so we'll ha' just to learn to bear our burdens."

Both Miss Williams and George laughed at this sally, and then they wandered over the rest of the house together. The only room which really looked cheerful and modern was the library; a fire was burning there, and the carpets were fresh and bright.

"Sir Hugh lives here when he's down," said Robert; "and we've orders that a fire is kept on summer and winter, 'to keep out the sea fog,' he says. But," continued Robert, with a sly chuckle, "we never found it in his father and mother's time. Maybe it's worse since then."

The fire however looked very inviting, for the house felt damp and chill, and Miss Williams went up to it, and held out her hands towards the cheerful blaze.

"I fear we have tired you with all this talk about old days," said George, addressing her.

"No," she answered gently; "but I was thinking of your cousin, and the poor mother's heart-breaking grief."

"Don't think of it any more, then," replied

George, kindly. "Sit here and warm yourself; and Katie, suppose you and Dolly go and try to find some of the maids, and get them to make us some tea."

The two girls were delighted to go on such an errand, and Robert went with them; "for though," he said, "Mrs. Bell the housekeeper's out, surely the lassies can do as much as that."

"He's only a poor opinion of Hugh's housekeeping, evidently," said George, smiling, after they were gone; and then he drew his chair to the fire, and noticed as he did so that Miss Williams looked both pale and fatigued.

She was gazing steadily into the fire, as if her thoughts were far away, and she scarcely moved as George came near.

"I really am afraid this has been too much for you," he said.

"I am tired; just a little bit," she answered. "I was not very strong before I came to the North."

"But you are getting so, I hope?" said George.

"Yes," she replied absently. And then, as if by an effort, she roused herself, and began talking to him on some indifferent subject.

"After all," said George, in a short time, "we must admit that Hugh has good taste; this room is the cosiest in the house."

"I could not live here at all, I think, if I were he," said Miss Williams, "where everything must remind him of a painful past."

"You forget Hugh is a philosopher," answered George, with a short laugh. "The king is dead—the king lives. If my uncle and poor Walter had not died, Hugh would have been broiling in India as a subaltern officer, and he's just the man to——"

"In India!" exclaimed Miss Williams, interrupting him, while a sudden flush dyed her pale face. "Was Sir Hugh Manners out in India with his regiment?"

She spoke in a tone of eager curiosity, and George Manners looked at her in great surprise as he answered—

"Yes, Hugh was there—let me see, three or four years."

"Do you know at what stations?"

"No, that I really do not. Hugh never wrote to me but once all the time he was out, and that letter was from Calcutta, just before his return. But why do you ask?"

Miss Williams hesitated a moment and then said slowly—

"Some of my people—some friends of mine, at least—have been there for many years."

"Military people, I suppose?" inquired George.

"Yes—but it is unlikely that Sir Hugh and they have ever met. India is a wide place;" and as she said this, she sighed deeply, and leant her forehead on her hand.

"It seems a painful subject to you," said George, with kindly interest.

"We all have them, I suppose, after youth is past," answered Miss Williams, and again she gave a heavy sigh.

"You are too young to talk thus," said George. "Many years of happiness, I trust, are yet in store for you."

"They will be different to the rest, then," said Miss Williams, with a mournful smile; and then rising from her seat she began slowly pacing the room, while George's eyes followed her with an uneasy glance.

"You must forgive me," she said, coming back to the fire after a few minutes, and speaking in her usual gentle tones. "Old memories came back to me when—when you mentioned India—old and painful thoughts."

"Try to forget them then," said George, kindly. "You are young—and I hope you are happy—with us all."

"I am, indeed," answered Miss Williams. "I came among strangers with a sinking heart. I fancied the life of a dependent must necessarily be a very

bitter one; but you have all made it happy and pleasant to me."

"I am very glad."

"I have never heard an unkind word, or met an unkind look;—yes, I have been very happy here—I should be sorry to have to go away."

"Not so sorry as we would be to lose you. But do not speak of it. I hope you will look on Narbrough as your home. My mother is always praising you, always telling me she is getting fonder of you every day."

"She is very kind."

"Yes, truly kind; you must look upon her as your friend, Miss Williams—upon us all as friends."

"Thanks, you are very good; but here are the children and the tea."

It was a very pleasant meal. George drew a small table near the fire, and they all sat round it; Dolly officiating as mistress of the ceremonies, and pressing on them the cakes and tea.

"It's a rare treat to hear a laugh under the old roof again, anyhow," said Robert, who was waiting on them. "I hope, Mr. George, you and the young ladies will not be so stranger like again."

"The tea has been the best of it," remarked Dolly, who never felt so happy as when she was in a prominent situation in life. "If I were cousin Hugh, I would not live here like a mouse, I

would give a ball, and have a really jolly dance."

"And ask Miss Dolly Manners, of course," said George. "Well, my dear, wait till he is married, and perhaps he will."

"I wonder if he will marry," said Katie, thoughtfully. "I wonder if he will marry——".

"Don't talk nonsense, child," said George, interrupting her. "And now, young ladies, if you have finished your tea, shall we go?"

They were soon ready; but George lingered behind to press a sovereign into Robert's reluctant hand.

"There's no call, Master George, indeed there's not. It's a pleasure to see you—one wants nought for't," he said.

"Nonsense, my man, nonsense," replied George. "Take it for the sake of old times, Bob; and come over and see us at the Vicarage soon. I am always at home at the end of the week, and I am sure the young ladies will be glad to see you any time."

"Thank you, sir, thank you kindly—thank you all. Who is she, Mr. George?" whispered the old servant, laying a detaining hand on George's arm. "She's an uncommon pretty young lady, and pleasant spoken, that's all I can say."

"She's a Miss Williams," answered George, and

he blushed; he felt ashamed to say she was his sister's governess.

"What a snob I am," he thought the next minute, as he hurried after the others—"what a snob and a fool!"





CHAPTER V.

ADELAIDE.

ANOTHER week or two passed away very pleasantly at the Vicarage; George Manners coming down at the end of each, and enlivening the whole family by his presence and his news. At every visit "his five children," as he called them, were not forgotten, but Dolly remarked rather jealously on one occasion — "Your sweets are in a pretty box always, Miss Williams, and ours only in paper."

"It's because she's the eldest," said George, laughing, and Miss Dolly was obliged to be content with his explanation.

Miss Williams had told George truly when she said she was beginning to be very happy at Narbrough. It is always pleasant to feel people like you, and she daily had that pleasure. The two elder girls treated her as a confidential friend, telling her their troubles, their quarrels, and how they hated Adelaide, and how badly she behaved to "mamma;" while the little ones were never so

happy as sitting on her knee, and listening to her fairy tales.

With the Vicar and his wife, too, all went on smoothly. Mrs. Manners really liked the soft, gentle, ladylike girl, who was so ready to please every one. And though the Vicar got very snappish sometimes, and declared she was "setting her cap at George," and "hoped the young fool would take care of himself," yet he also would now really have missed Miss Williams, and generally came out of his study when he heard her singing in the evenings, and would compliment her on her voice and expression.

"You see what a siren you are, Miss Williams," he would say, "calling me away from my work." His "work," consisted generally in reading an amusing book, smoking his pipe, and not unfrequently consoling himself with a glass of whisky toddy. But still it spoke highly of Miss Williams' attractions in his eyes, to be able to draw him away from anything which he considered so comfortable. By-and-by, however, these pleasant days came to an end, for Adelaide Manners, the Vicar's eldest daughter, returned to her home.

"Here's a letter from Adelaide," the Vicar said to his wife one morning at breakfast time, passing on one which he held in his hand. "She's coming back at the end of the week."

"Very well, my dear," answered Mrs. Manners; but a cloud came over her usually happy face.

"Miss Manners writes a good hand, doesn't she?" she said to Miss Williams, after just glancing at the note, and handing the envelope to the governess as she spoke. Then Miss Williams knew who had written the letters to engage her; the cold explicit letters, which had given her such a wrong impression of her kindly hostess.

"She wrote to me before I came, did she not?" she asked, after looking at the handwriting.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Manners; "Adelaide generally writes all the letters when she's at home.

"When it suits her fancy to do so, that is," said the Vicar. "Adelaide is like the most of you women, Miss Williams, as they say in the country, 'bad to guide.'"

Miss Manners came home at the time she had announced, and the whole house seemed changed both before and after her arrival. In the first place, Mrs. Manners had what is called a "general cleaning," in preparation for her coming—and stairs without carpets, and a powerful perfume of beeswax and turpentine do not add to the comfort of an establishment. Then Miss Williams was given to understand that when "Adelaide was at home" they dined late; that is, there was a regular dinner in the dining-room at half-past six o'clock, instead

of the usual early one, and "high tea," at which the Vicar and George generally dined. So Miss Williams and the children now partook of that refreshment in the schoolroom, while Mrs. Manners sat down to table with her stately stepchild.

All this was not very pleasant. It broke into the homely and friendly ways of the house, to which Miss Williams had now become accustomed; and a frown settled down on Mr. George Manners' forehead, when on the Saturday evening he returned home as usual, and found, on coming in to dinner, that his friend the governess was not present.

"So you haven't Miss Williams down when you dine late, mother?" he said.

"My dear George!" exclaimed Miss Manners in surprise.

"Well, my dear Adelaide!" he said, very crossly, "what then?"

"The idea of having the governess down to a late dinner, George!" she answered, with a little scornful laugh—"preposterous."

"Have you seen her?" asked Mr. Manners.

"Yes, for a minute—I think her rather an overdressed young person," replied Miss Manners; "and then she does her hair so absurdly, with those long curls."

George made no answer to this speech of his sister's, but sat almost silent during the rest of the

dinner, and when it was over lit his cigar without a word, and left the room and went into the garden.

He was greatly annoyed, for he had got to like Miss Williams, during the last few weeks, as he had never liked any woman before, and it was only natural, therefore, that he should not care to see her slighted. Still his commonsense told him he could scarcely expect her to be treated as a guest, and yet he felt very angry with his sister for so plainly reminding him of this fact.

"So Miss Adelaide has to turn everything upside down at her will, has she," he thought, angrily, as he walked up and down the damp garden walks. "Well, we'll see about that. I would marry her I believe to-morrow if I could afford it; but I can't, so it's no use thinking of it. But she's superior to every one of them, and I won't see her snubbed if I can help it."

"But why should I fancy she would have me, even if my circumstances were different?" he presently asked himself. "I have little cause."

This was true. There had been nothing in Miss Williams' manner during the weeks which he had known her that had indicated any particular wish to attract either his admiration or regard. Since that day at the Hall, indeed, she had treated him with a kind of quiet intimacy, and seemed to have put

some faith in his offers of friendship ; but this had been all. He was interested in her, and had been kind to her, and she felt some sort of gratitude to him in return. This was the conclusion which George Manners came to, as he walked restlessly up and down in the misty twilight.

“But I like her,” he added, mentally—“I like her.” And then the old question of ways and means rose gloomily in his mind. “For I’m not such a scoundrel as to try to make her care for me, I hope, and then leave her to pine ; but for all that I am not going to be ruled by Adelaide.” And as he thought this, he pitched his cigar irritably among the raspberry bushes, and, after hesitating a moment or two longer, walked back into the house, and went straight upstairs to the school-room door.

“Come in,” said Dolly’s pert voice, from inside, after he had knocked ; so he opened the door, and found them all sitting at the table drinking their tea—that is, the children were ; for Miss Williams was standing by the fire, looking, George thought, both pale and weary, with her untasted cup on the mantel-piece beside her.

“We heard you come,” she said, holding out her hand to Mr. Manners with a smile.

“Yes,” answered George, and then he looked at the table with a very dissatisfied glance. “You

don't seem to have things very comfortable here," he added.

"Yes, George, isn't it a shame," said Dolly, eagerly, "the tea is so cold; and the bread and butter so thick and horrid, we can hardly eat it."

"Ring for some fresh," said George, sharply, "and tell them to make you some toast."

"Nonsense, nonsense," said Miss Williams, smiling good naturedly, "it does very well, as it is; besides, the servants have been busy with the dinner."

"That is no reason why you should be neglected," answered George. "If you will allow me, Miss Williams, I will ring the bell."

"No," she said, and she put out her hand and just touched his arm; "no, Mr. Manners, please do not—I should rather you did not."

"Have you had anything to eat?" said George. "No, I see. Do you know it is really too bad; bad for Milly too. I will speak to my mother about it; and in the meantime, Dolly, as Miss Williams won't allow us to ring, suppose you and I try to make some toast for the two delicate ones."

"I hope I'm not of them?" said Miss Williams, with a little laugh.

"You don't look overstrong, as you stand there

at any rate," answered George. "Now, Dolly, see whose toast will be best."

George had, however, over-estimated his abilities. His toast would fall off the point of the knife into the cinders on the hearth, or get blackened against the bars, and the children crowded round him, watching him with delight burning his face and scorching his fingers, and only making some very bad toast after all. Perhaps, however, he would not have knelt so long patiently on the rug, if a pretty blue skirt had not been almost touching his arm all the time, and a very pretty pair of small feet resting on the fender near. As it was, he got quite into a good humour over his occupation, and declared that in time he would become a first-rate cook, and be able to make a living by the profession.

"We'll have some fresh tea, too, I'm determined," he said, at length rising to his feet. "I'm dying of thirst, so don't grudge me a cup, Miss Williams, and I'm not going to drink this cold stuff."

So the bell was rung, after all, and Miss Williams, the children, and George sat round the table and drank the fresh tea, and eat the spoilt toast, and laughed and chatted very merrily together. Then, after they had finished, they gathered round the fire, and Bonny, mounting her gover-

ness's knee, said, "Now, Willy, tell us some fairies."

"Yes, do," said George, "we're all attention."

But Miss Williams shook her head, and presently Milly, laying her pretty cheek against her brother's knee said, in her soft little way—

"About the pantomime, Georgie—and the golden stars?"

"To be sure!" cried George Manners, "a happy thought, Milly." He felt just in the humour to do something to defy his sister, and he thought the Christmas play which they had talked about, with himself and Miss Williams as performers, would certainly do this.

"Let us talk it over," he said. "What shall it be?"

Then a long consultation followed, and at last a piece was agreed upon. An old, old, simple story, we almost all have once been interested in. Some, how long ago! Some but yesterday, for whom life's real play has scarce begun. Some, seeing again with love's fond light, read it once more amid their children's prattle. But we all remember it—the pretty fairy tale which filled us once with wonder and delight, and goes on still, fresh and beautiful, for each fresh young heart in turn.

But they were to keep it a secret. Miss Williams agreed to write a kind of acting version of

the old story suitable to their age, and George Manners promised to have everything necessary ready in time. It was now about the second week in November, and on the 24th of December their little Christmas play was to be performed ; so they had plenty of time to make preparations.

"Mamma said we might," said Katie, on Miss Williams mentioning something about consulting the lady of the house. "She said, if George wished it, it was sure to be all right."

"And Miss Manners?" asked Miss Williams.

"What has Adelaide to do with it?" answered George, frowning. "We can amuse ourselves without her leave, can't we? We did very well before she came, Miss Williams, and we'll do very well when she is gone."

"I wish she was," said the free-spoken Dolly ; "I hate Adelaide. She puts everything wrong. Mamma is cross, Willie is dull, and Georgie——"

"Well, what is Georgie, miss?"

"Georgie looks like thunder."

In the meantime a serious skirmish was going on downstairs between poor Mrs. Manners and her refractory stepchild. Adelaide had seated herself in one of the easy-chairs by the fire, immediately after dinner, with a very dissatisfied expression of countenance ; for, to do her justice, she was fond in her way of her only brother, and she felt annoyed

that any disagreement should, so soon after her return home, have arisen between them.

"What a stupid boy he is," she thought, kindly enough; "how little he knows of the world; fancy quarrelling about that absurd young person!"

Presently she heard him open the hall door, and she turned round with a smile to welcome him, quite prepared to look over his bad temper; but George, as we know, went upstairs.

In a little while the sound of voices and laughter—a man's laughter—was very distinctly heard from the schoolroom above. Adelaide listened, bit her lips, and then rose and opened the door to assure herself.

"Mrs. Manners," said she, coming back and standing by the fire, "George is in the schoolroom. Is—he is in the habit of going there?"

Mrs. Manners moved uneasily on being thus addressed. She had, indeed, been dosing over the fire, and was but half awake when her step-daughter spoke to her.

"What?" she said. "Oh, George is in the schoolroom, is he? Well, my dear, why shouldn't he be there?"

"And you allow it?" Adelaide Manners asked this in such a tone of suppressed indignation that she effectually roused her stepmother.

"Well, really, Adelaide, what harm is there?"

she said. "George is fond of the children, poor fellow—why shouldn't he be with them?"

"And the governess," said Adelaide, "is she there too?"

"Why, of course, Adelaide—George likes Miss Williams very much."

"If you don't take care," said Adelaide, her sharp voice ringing so clear and loud, that it awoke the sleeping Vicar—"if you don't take care, we will be having another *mésalliance* in the family, and one has surely been enough."

Mrs. Manners did not exactly understand the French word, but she understood the whole meaning of the speech, and her comely pleasant face suddenly became scarlet.

"You—you are always quarrelling" she said, in a voice broken with tears.

This roused the Vicar.

"I'll tell you what it is, Adelaide," he said, pulling his silk pocket handkerchief angrily off his face, "I'll tell you what it is, I'll have none of this. You forget in whose house you are. If you come to mine, you must try to treat your mother with respect."

"She is not my mother," retorted Adelaide.

"She's my wife at any rate," answered the Vicar, in great wrath; "and by Jove, if you don't learn to behave yourself, you may march. As for alliances,

or *mésalliances*, which you are so fond of talking about," he continued, rising, "I wonder you don't try to form an alliance yourself—if you could only get any one to be fool enough to have you."

Tears sprang into Miss Manners' eyes as her father spoke. "You are all rude to me," she said. "You all hate me.—Oh! mamma, mamma, why did you die, and leave me alone?" and sobbing out the last words she hurried from the room.

"Oh Arthur! I'm sorry she's vexed," said Mrs. Manners, drying her own good-natured face.

"Serve her right," answered the Vicar savagely, "she's always meddling. Why doesn't she catch Hugh, and go back to her old home, if she's too fine a lady for her father's house. I am sure no one would miss her."

The thought of any human being in distress was, however, painful to Mrs. Manners, and after sitting uneasily for a few minutes—the reverend philosopher having again composed himself to sleep—Mrs. Manners rose and went softly upstairs, and knocked gently at Adelaide's door.

No one spoke in reply to her summons, so she opened the door and went into the room, where she found Miss Manners lying on the bed and sobbing bitterly.

"My dear," said her kindly stepmother, "my dear Adelaide, don't."

"Go away," cried Adelaide. "You have turned my father and brother against me;—go away, and leave me alone."

"Oh Adelaide! how can you say it? I never mention your name. Why can't you be like George, and like the rest?—you have all one father."

"What am I to him?" said Adelaide, bitterly. "You heard what he said, he would turn me out of the house if I dare to speak."

"We most of us say things we're sorry for as soon as our passion is over," replied Mrs. Manners, gently. "I'm sure he didn't mean it. Why, all his talk this week has been about having things nice for you; more as you have been accustomed to."

"What matter is it?" said Miss Manners.

"But it is," went on the kind creature, "it is matter for you to be well and happy in your father's house; and you the eldest too—the eldest girl I mean."

"I was vexed about George," said Miss Manners, beginning to be ashamed of her ill-temper, and sitting up in bed.

"But, dear, don't you see George is a grown man, and men wont be thwarted;—and as for Miss Williams, a pleasanter young lady I never met."

"But who is she?" said Adelaide.

"Why, Adelaide, you engaged her yourself. Didn't you write all the letters, and didn't you say

the reference was satisfactory. There was a Mrs. Colonel Ross, or something like that, in India—don't you remember?"

"Yes, I remember. I wonder if Hugh knows anything of her. He knew lots of Indian people. I have the letters from the register woman in my desk some way. Perhaps Mrs. Ross's husband's regiment is mentioned."

She got up as she spoke, and began turning over some letters in her desk, and glancing at their addresses.

"Here they are," she said presently, opening a packet; "yes, Colonel Ross's regiment is mentioned. Why, it is the 3rd!—Hugh's own old regiment. If there is such a person," continued Adelaide, eagerly, "he will know. I wish he would come back."

"Well, you can ask him when he comes," replied Mrs. Manners, with a little sigh. "And now, come downstairs, my dear, and don't say anything more to vex your brother."

This, however, Adelaide found very hard to do. George came down from the schoolroom defiant and talkative, full of the children's play, and very quietly ignored his sister's presence; answering her direct questions with the very scantiest of courtesies, and plainly showing her how much he was offended. It was "mother" this, and "mother" that, and

Adelaide sat biting her lips behind a book, and trying not to notice his manner.

The next day was equally unfortunate. Adelaide got up in the morning with the good intention of endeavouring to keep friends with her brother, but George, impatient of remark or control, felt still resentful, and his first greeting to her was anything but encouraging.

"I will wait for you, George," she said, "and we can walk on to church together."

"Thank you," he answered, "but don't mind waiting, for I promised Milly and the rest to go with them." And when Adelaide came downstairs ready dressed she found George standing with his hat on, leaning against the front door, and with an indignant gesture she swept past him, and presently had the satisfaction of seeing him enter the church, accompanied by Miss Williams and her little sisters, and with anger and jealousy in her heart Adelaide sat through the service.

"But who is this woman, I wonder?" she thought; "this woman George prefers to his own sister." And her proud dark eyes wandered over the governess's face and person with curiosity and surprise. "Where could she get such expensive dress," she asked herself. "Where? But Hugh was coming—Hugh would know something of this

Colonel—might even know something of Miss Williams herself.”

With these reflections she consoled herself, trusting that her cousin at all events might be able to give her some clue to trace out the mystery which, as she sat watching Miss Williams, she was beginning to be convinced surrounded her.

But other eyes were also that morning looking with some uneasiness at the governess. George Manners, sitting opposite to her in the Vicar's square pew, was thinking on pretty much the same subject as his sister. “How did a poor governess get all these fine things?” What struck him particularly was a remarkably handsome sealskin jacket, under which, in the chill November morning, pretty Miss Williams sat shivering. He happened to know their value just at that time, as he had been planning a birthday present of one to his stepmother, and he bit his lips and stroked his moustache, which with him was always a sign of mental disturbance, as he looked at Miss Williams; and for the first time since he had known her, some painful doubts and misgivings rose in his mind.

So strongly did this sealskin jacket influence him, that after the service was over he went into the vestry and waited for his father, instead of, as usual, walking home with the rest of the family.

“I will see as little of her as possible,” he

thought ; and then, instead of keeping to his resolution, as soon as dinner was over he found his way up to the schoolroom, and spent most of the afternoon there, sitting by the fire and talking over the Christmas play.





CHAPTER VI.

AT CHRISTMAS.

NEARLY another month passed away, and Adelaide Manners remained still at the Vicarage.

George came and went as usual, but had grown so capricious in his conduct and temper, that neither his mother, the children, nor Miss Williams could understand him. Some days he was the same as ever; nay, brighter, happier, and more full of life than before, while on others he was sulky, misanthropic, and satirical by turns. In truth, a great struggle was going on in his heart, and he could not make up his mind; or having made it, could not keep to the determinations which he formed, and, angry and annoyed at his own weakness, he showed it by his constant changefulness and impatience.

A hundred times he had told himself that the less he had to say to his sister's governess the better; that there was something mysterious about her and her early life; that he had nothing to

offer her, and that it was altogether unsuitable. But when he saw her sweet face again the old charm was too strong for him, and he would curse himself for his ungenerous suspicions, and wonder at his own presumption and folly.

Adelaide saw the struggle which was going on in her brother's mind, for she was clever, but Miss Williams did not, and was hurt at his change of conduct, and began to fix her large grey eyes on his face sometimes and wonder what made him so different.

In the meanwhile, one way or other, she was constantly thrown with him. Their Christmas play they found to be surrounded with unforeseen difficulties, but the children were so determined not to give it up that the only thing seemed to be to strive to contend with them. All this of course made them more intimate, and George, with restless sighs and impatient frowns, could not tell whether this pleased or angered him the most.

Thus things went on till a few days before Christmas, when their invitations were issued, their holly was gathered, and even Adelaide began to be rather interested in their mysterious proceedings. No one, however, was to know anything about the little play they had agreed but George, Miss Williams, and the four girls; so Miss Manners was not admitted into their

councils, and continued to treat Miss Williams with the most haughty reserve.

The day after the invitations had been sent out to almost all the little boys and girls in the neighbourhood, Miss Williams chanced to be giving Milly a music lesson in the drawing-room which contained the only piano in the house, when a lady, whose arrival they had not heard, was ushered in, and whose name Miss Williams did not catch as the servant announced her.

Miss Williams rose and bowed, and said a few words politely about the cold, and placed a chair near the fire for their visitor.

She was a little bright-eyed woman about fifty, and during the next few minutes made herself very agreeable.

"Is Adelaide Manners at home?" she asked, in a perfectly free and easy manner.

"Yes," replied Miss Williams; "I daresay she will be here directly. Run, Milly dear, and see if they have told your sister that a lady is waiting for her."

"Which of them is that?" asked the lady as Milly ran away.

"She is the third; I mean of the present Mrs. Manners' children."

"Oh to be sure. She is a good creature though, isn't she, Mrs. Manners? I am glad Adelaide has

stayed a little longer this time at home. She should try to get to like her stepmother if she can."

"Yes," said Miss Williams, in rather a constrained voice.

"Of course these things are very annoying; very awkward for the first family," went on the lady. "Still, when a thing is done it is wiser to make the best of it, I think. My husband, Sir Thomas, did, and no one was more vexed at the time about it, I believe, than he was, for he and the Vicar were such old cronies. But about the invitation for Christmas Eve which my little girls have received? It says something of a sort of charade, and I called on Adelaide, or rather on Mrs. Manners I should say, to ask if my little people, or their governess, who is really a nice creature, would be any use to the young Mannerses in getting it up. Do you think so?"

"I really cannot tell," replied Miss Williams, with some hesitation. "Mr.—Mr. Manners has arranged it all."

"What, George? George is a fine young fellow. He is a favourite of mine. I like George Manners—I admire him for doing what I consider was his duty."

"Yes."

"Perhaps you don't know the story; but I'm an old

friend—the oldest and most intimate poor Lady Manners had. I know the ins and the outs, as the children say, of the whole family ; and George was right, though Adelaide will not think so.”

“He seems a very—— But here is Miss Manners.”

The door opened as Miss Williams spoke, and Adelaide came hastily in, and with a much warmer manner than she ever used in her own family, ran up to their guest, saying—

“Oh, Lady Lilbourne, I’m so glad to see you.”

“Well, Adelaide, how are you?” replied Lady Lilbourne, giving her a good-natured, but rather indifferent kind of kiss. “You see I’ve kept my word, and come to see you, though I don’t know that I might have come so soon, and in this cold weather too, if it had not been on this business for the little ones about your charade on Christmas Eve. This young lady tells me George is the manager, but I daresay you can tell me all about it?”

Adelaide gave one glance of her cold, proud eyes at Miss Williams as she replied—

“Yes, my brother has made all the arrangements. He got it up to please the children, but I am not in the secret.”

“Well, tell him from me, then, that if he wants any help, my young people will be delighted to come over and do what they can. Indeed, they are

dying to do it, and have been teasing me ever since the invitation came to let them get up one by themselves ; but we must see how yours comes off first. Who is she ?" continued Lady Lilbourne ; for Miss Williams left the room while she was speaking, and her ladyship scarcely allowed the door to close before she made the inquiry.

"She is the children's governess," answered Adelaide, indifferently.

"She is a very pretty, elegant young woman. Mrs. Mannors has been exceedingly fortunate in getting her, for I always say there is nothing such a bad example to girls as a common dowdy-looking person to be constantly with them. I always try to get good looking nurses and governesses."

"This one strikes me as being very much overdressed, and I think rather forward."

"She is so pretty, you see. I daresay all the men try to turn her head. She is remarkably pretty."

"Do you think so ?" said Adelaide, with a jealous, angry heart.

"There's no doubt of it. Ask any man you know. She's just that soft taking style of beauty which they all admire. What does George say about her ?"

"Very little."

"Ah, George is one of the deep ones ; but take

care, Adelaide. Keep your pretty governess out of Cousin Hugh's way. We all know his failing." And Lady Lilbourne laughed pleasantly, unconscious or careless of the bitter mortification she was inflicting.

"Sir Hugh would not—would never——" began Adelaide, and then she checked herself, turning crimson over her whole face.

"What was it you were saying?" she continued, after a moment's hesitation. "Oh yes, about your message to George."

"I want to know if the children or their governess would be any use to him? And tell him, my dear, also from me, that I should like to see this little performance, as I am thinking of getting up something of the same kind at Lilbourne."

"Oh, they will be delighted to see you, of course; but it won't be worth coming for, Lady Lilbourne; only the merest child's play."

"Well, never mind; but what do you say, Adelaide? Suppose you come to me for the next few days, and then we can drive over together on Christmas Eve? I declare it is very cool of me asking myself in this way, but I do like to see little people enjoy themselves; and you've nothing to prevent you coming, have you, if you have nothing to do with it?"

"Very well," said Adelaide. She was glad of

any change, and Lady Lilbourne's was a pleasant house to stay in, and where, indeed, she felt almost at home; for as Lady Lilbourne had told Miss Williams, Lady Manners had been one of her oldest friends, and from her childhood Adelaide had been in the habit of going to the house.

Mrs. Manners was out when Lady Lilbourne called, and before she returned her stepdaughter was gone. She had, however, left, at Lady Lilbourne's request, a few pencilled lines for Mrs. Manners, telling her of her own and Lady Lilbourne's intentions, and enclosing also a message from her Ladyship to George, to offer the assistance of her children and governess.

"Adelaide is gone! Hurrah! hurrah!" cried Dolly an hour afterwards, rushing into the school-room. "Mamma has had a note. She's not coming back till the night of the play. Isn't it jolly? We'll have fun now; there'll be no one now to sneer or hide from."

Miss Williams only laughed when Dolly told her news, but the whole family felt Adelaide's absence a relief, and went on making their paper roses and holly garlands for the decorations with renewed pleasure and zest.

The day before Christmas Eve George Manners had promised to come, and he did so late in the afternoon, in the midst of a terrible snow-storm,

white from his hat to his boots ; and they all ran downstairs into the hall to welcome him, when they heard him stamping and shaking himself there.

"I'm not quite lost, you see," he said, holding out his hand, with a sudden glow spreading over his dark face, and a new kindness and brightness in his eyes, when he saw that Miss Williams had come among the rest.

"What have you brought us?" she asked, smiling. So George drew his parcels from his pockets, and pointed to those which James, the old manservant, had brought from the station for him, which the children immediately seized upon, opening them with various exclamations of pleasure and delight.

"Oh, George, what a darling you are ! Look, Miss Williams, isn't this lovely ? Oh, Milly, let me see the shoes," were heard on all sides ; while George, looking happy and handsome, stood by Miss Williams' side, vainly trying to keep some order amongst them.

"Bring them into the dining-room," he said at last, "and we'll all look at them together ;" and accordingly hither they adjourned, littering the table and the floor in a few minutes, so that Mrs. Manners held up her hands in dismay when she came in, and asked where George *was* to get his dinner amid all this confusion ?

“Never mind, mother,” he said, good temperedly, “let them stay. It’s very jolly as it is. We must be very merry to-night, you know.” And he did, indeed, look as though he had left all his care behind, and had, the children declared, brought everything they wanted.

They had fixed before that their performance was to take place in a large empty room attached to the vestry, which had originally been intended for a village schoolroom. But it had been long unused, for at this time there was no school at Narbrough; and being much larger than any of the low old-fashioned rooms at the Vicarage, they had decided it would be more convenient to have the acting there. Afterwards the forms were to be cleared away for a dance, during which interval refreshments were to be served to the children. Such was their programme. But only the snow—was it not vexing, as they all thought of the little girls, their thin shoes and white frocks?

“We’ll manage it somehow,” said George, cheerily, as they were talking it over. “The gentlemen must carry the ladies. Mind, Miss Williams, you look on me as your cavalier.”

She shook her head and gave a little laugh in reply, and then they went once more into the question of ways and means, counting their numbers and finally fixing that George should ride over

to Lilbourne Tower in the morning to ask the young Lilbournes to come an hour earlier than the rest, so as to be able to assist them in part of the performance.

"If we don't begin getting the holly put up in the schoolroom at once," said Dolly, "it will never be done."

"Dolly is right," said George, "but the fire is so jolly, and the room so warm, that by Jove I hate to turn out; but we must go, I suppose. It's all down there, isn't it, girls? Run, then, and get on your hats, and my Milly and Bonny will be good little chicks and go to bed."

This, however, they were very unwilling to do. They wanted to help to put the holly up also, but were at last persuaded to go into the kitchen instead, where Mrs. Manners and the cook were busy, surrounded with good cheer.

Katie and Dolly were gone before the little ones could be prevailed upon to stay at home without crying; so George and Miss Williams were left, and when she came downstairs ready dressed to go out, he was standing, cap in hand, waiting for her in the hall.

"I will take care of you," he said, as he opened the door.

All the world outside was white, shining, and beautiful. The moon was up and the wind had

gone down, and George's arm was trembling as he held it towards her.

"Take fast hold," he said, "and mind where you put your little feet."

She laid her hand lightly on his arm as he spoke, and thus they went out together alone amid the snow.

"Take care," he said presently, as she gave a little slip, "take care, Amy."

He looked down at her as he said this. His face was flushed and his eyes were soft, and he smiled as she made a kind of movement, when he called her by her name. It seemed so long to her since she had heard it—so strange to her to hear it then.

"You are not angry that I should say that?" he asked. "You know you told me you were Amy the other day."

"No," she said, with a sort of touch of sadness in her tone, "no, I am not angry, because we are friends—quite old friends, I think, now."

"Yes," he answered, and his voice was very tremulous, "we are friends, are we not—dear friends?"

"But I do not know that I should be," said Miss Williams, smiling and looking up. "I do not think you have been very friendly of late. You have often been—what shall I say?—rather cross."

"Have I?"

"Yes, indeed. Has anything been the matter? Will you be frank with me? Have I vexed you about anything?"

George was silent.

"Will you not tell me?" went on Miss Williams.

"Perhaps I've been vexed at myself," he said.

"But why did that make you cross with me?"

He bit his lips for a moment and then smiled.

"Of course," he said, "you ladies always are wise—always are right; but can you understand how—well, how a poor fellow gets tossed and driven between opposing interests and feelings sometimes? Suppose a man is doing what he knows he has no right to do, Miss Williams, it does not add to the evenness of his temper."

"But are you?" asked Miss Williams.

"Yes," said George, sharply, "yes; but I won't talk about it to-night. Hear the sea, child—what does that make you feel?"

"I do not know; a kind of vague dreamy feeling, I think."

"I wonder what feelings are?" George went on, with a sort of excitement in his voice and manner. "What mad fools we are to struggle so with them—to fret and vex ourselves and reason about this and that. It all comes to the same thing in the end, I believe—we fall at last."

"What do you mean?"

"I am talking at random I dare say. I was thinking how strong we are against small temptations, and how weak against real ones. I was thinking, Miss Williams, of myself with the most thorough contempt.

"I can't understand you to-night."

"I've left off trying to do that lately," said George, with a short laugh. "I used to pride myself on my strength, Miss Williams; I feel very much inclined to give you a proof of my weakness to-night."

"It is cold," said Miss Williams, with a shiver. She did not care to encourage the conversation.

"Is it?" he said, and then he stooped down as if he would kiss her. "It is Christmas time, Amy—will you?"—but she pushed him sharply away.

"Don't, Mr. Manners," she said, "don't. Have you not a little more friendship for me than that?"

"God knows I have some sort of very true feeling at any rate," he answered. "But you are right—forgive me. What a brute you must think me."

"We are forgetting the holly," said Miss Williams.

"Oh! confound the holly—stay a little while. Why are you in such a hurry? Amy—if a man——."

"I cannot stop to hear," said Miss Williams,
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quickly. "Come, Mr. Manners, the Vicar and the children will be waiting for us."

They were now close to the schoolroom, and with an impatient gesture, George followed her to its door. They found Katie and Dolly already actively employed putting up the holly, assisted by the village carpenter, under the Vicar's directions, who advanced to meet them as they went in.

"I hope you have not hurried yourselves?" he said, sarcastically. "But judging from appearances neither you nor George seem to suffer from cold."

Miss Williams blushed, and George frowned and looked very foolish at the Vicar's speech, and then they both began to busy themselves with the decorations. But his work seemed to bring him ever to her side. He was flushed, excited, and happy. "How beautiful she is," he thought, as his eyes followed her; "how fair, how graceful, and how good." Then he began to think despondingly of the very humble home which for years was all he could offer her.

"But if she loves me,"—and George's heart beat and his hands trembled, till Dolly cried out he was spoiling the wreaths they had taken such pains with; that he was no use; that really he had better let John Foster, the carpenter, put them all up.

"I think I had, indeed," said George, sitting

down on a bench. "I do not know whatever has come over me."

Oh, how he cursed as he sat there the follies of his youth—the follies which had hung a millstone round his neck, which had bounds his hands with such heavy fetters. If it had not been for the three thousand pounds—but the three thousand pounds of debt, a sacred debt of honour, stood sternly in his way.

"I spend a little more than two hundred a-year now—could we live on that?" he thought. Then dismal letters in the papers he had read from desponding mothers and despairing wives rose grimly in his mind—the butcher—the baker—the washing—the nursemaid, and the rent! Ah! dreadful items—horrible necessities of civilization; and then George looked at Miss Williams' dress and shuddered.

"How would she like to wear a cotton dress, and cook my dinners?" he asked himself, mentally. "How would she like to slave and toil in some poor cottage through the long dull day? It is madness—madness."

Then another sweet madness rose before his mind—that dear face welcoming him at the cottage door; that slight lithe form leaning caressingly by his chair; it was a dangerous vision.—George sprang up and went to the open door, and stood

looking out upon the snow ; out on the still and peaceful scene—on the white and silent world. He could see in the moonlight the tombstones by the church—could see where his uncle and cousins lay. “They too tossed and fretted,” he thought, “through their brief lives—they too struggled and failed—as I will. But if she loves me.” He turned round and saw Miss Williams’ soft eyes watching him.

“Why should I throw my happiness away?” he said, half aloud, and went up to her and stood, asking her if he could help her ; looking the love which was burning in his heart.

“We will soon be done,” she said. “But why do you look so grave? Nothing has annoyed you I hope?”

“No.”

“What is the matter?” And she looked up into his face.

“Nothing—nothing,” replied George. “I will tell you some other time.”

“But you look so serious——.”

“I have been thinking seriously—I will tell you soon ; but go on with your work now, and I will sit and watch you.”

“You are a very lazy man !”

George smiled, a warm fond smile, and then went to his old seat on the bench, and sat looking at, and thinking of his love.

"At least Adelaide won't be able to snub her any more," he reflected, knitting his brows, and stamping his foot as that annoyance passed through his mind.

He had in fact never got over Miss Williams' schoolroom dinners and early teas. Some small things worry certain people more than great ones, and George had fumed and fretted over this slight to his friend, till he had learnt almost to dislike his sister; and a hard smile stole over his face as he sat there with folded arms, and thought how soon Miss Adelaide might have to humble her proud heart.

"Hold this for me, George," cried Katie from the top of a step-ladder.

"You idle lazy boy!" said Dolly, "do lend me a hand here too."

So George got up and held ivy wreaths, and nailed up holly ones, and began to laugh and to be merry. His struggle was over. He had made up his mind. He meant to ask his sister's governess to marry him, on little more than two hundred a year!





CHAPTER VII.

THE CHILDREN'S PLAY.

WHEN the sun rose up the next morning, and shone on the snowy world around Narbrough, the first faint pink beams awoke a young man still strong and resolute in his purpose, and with all his noblest and tenderest feelings freshened and kindled by having made it.

He was going to do a rash thing—a foolish thing in the eyes of worldly men and women. He was going to ask a penniless woman whom he loved to share poverty, but not shame with him. Going to say, Will you begin at the bottom of the hill, and toil upwards with me? Cheer me in my struggles for daily bread; in my disappointments; my losses;—perhaps in my defeat? Will you do this because you love me? If you do not—but, ah, what lover ever dwelt upon this cruel thought! Other and warmer ones were beating in poor George's heart that winter morning; making the world for him all music and delight.

It was the old, old melody that was ringing in

his ears. The love song which, first heard in Paradise, has rung and echoed through all ages since. George had listened, and all his prudence, all his worldliness, had vanished in the spell. He who had struggled and doubted; he who had weighed this thing and that, and counted the cost, and thought of bills, of debts, and of pride, was now all eager, trembling, and afraid. "When should he ask her?" "What should he say?" "Would she be willing to sacrifice so much?"—These were the questions which he asked and answered a hundred times on that Christmas morning.

In the meanwhile Miss Williams was thinking of George also, and with some uneasiness in her heart.

"Poor George," she said, half aloud, as she stood combing back her brown hair, and arranging the two long curls Adelaide Manners found so much fault with, by the dim light of the winter's sun. "Poor George—I hope he will never learn to love me."

"I am changed," she thought, standing before the glass, and looking at the fair face it reflected, with the tender loving eyes, and slight lines of care, "changed—but no wonder—no wonder,—and it's better I should be—better for George—for us both." Yet she did not seem to wish to make herself less attractive in his eyes. She put on her most becoming dress and ornaments. She smiled

on him when she went down stairs, as sweetly and frankly as before. She scolded him in her pretty way for being awkward, and interfering with their arrangements, and finally sent him out among the snow, happy, light-hearted, and content. Yet she meant him no wrong—nay, she would not have wronged him for the world.

What a busy day this was at the Vicarage ; what a merry cheerful day. They laughed at the scrap dinner in the schoolroom ; they laughed when the cook came to say the frost had thickened her jellies. They made light of all the little mischances and failures which so constantly occur during the preparations for a party. As for the children, they were perfectly wild ; Dolly being absolutely past all control, and even gentle Milly was restless and excited ; while Bonny was twice caught putting her sticky little fingers into the ornamental creams on the supper table, and Miss Williams tried in vain to keep any order among them.

At last the time came ; at last five o'clock, and a few minutes afterwards Lady Lilbourne's carriage, containing her three little girls and their governess, was seen approaching ; they having been invited to come an hour earlier than the rest of the company, as they were expected to take some part in the performance. After this the hurrying to and fro between the house and the schoolroom was some-

thing wonderful, for at the end they found a hundred things had been forgotten, and George nearly lost all patience between them, and declared he would never have anything to do with such an affair again in his life, and Miss Williams had to exert some influence before he was restored to equanimity.

At six o'clock, carriage after carriage, laden with nearly all the children in the neighbourhood, began to drive up through the frosty air to the school-room door. More than thirty children at last assembled, and were welcomed and shown to their places on the long benches by kind Mrs. Manners, who was a great favourite amongst them. Then came Lady Lilbourne and Adelaide Manners, and then a dozen or more hangers-on, male and female, of the establishment, all the old servants having received permission to come, till the room was quite full, and the agitated performers, peeping through the green curtain which divided the stage from the audience, saw a crowd of faces, before which they were expected to exhibit themselves.

When every one was settled, and all full of expectation, a very small boy, dressed in an exaggerated livery, appeared before the curtain, bearing a large placard, on which was announced, in very large letters, that "The Genteel Comedy of Cinde-

rella, or the Glass Slipper," was about to be performed, and claiming their polite attention.

When the little boys and girls assembled read this, or had it explained to them, there was great laughter and clapping of hands. They all knew the pretty tale, and were all interested in it, and kept wondering who would be Cinderella, and who would be the Prince.

Then the curtain drew up, and sitting on the coal-scuttle by the empty grate, with her fair long hair all rough and dishevelled, and her commonest dress all tattered and torn, was lovely Milly Manners—the loveliest Cinderella surely that ever was seen, since the day when the old story was first wrote and read.

"It's Milly," said the eager little girls.

"It's Milly—how pretty she looks," thought the eager little boys.

Then Katie and Dolly entered the scene, dressed to represent the cruel sisters; dressed in their best, with some very gorgeous looking ornaments sparkling on their necks and hands. They passed Milly at first without speaking; only tossing up their heads at her, and looking very contemptuous, while poor Cinderella sat still, downcast and unhappy.

"Why do you sit there, you stupid little fright?" then said Dolly, addressing her. "Why don't you get up and make yourself useful? Go and wash

your hands, and then come and help us to dress for the Prince's Ball."

"But I should like to go too," said Milly, meekly.

"You!" cried Dolly, with a scream of derision, "you, with your rags and your dirty face, and your coarse hands—You! What would the Prince say, I wonder, if he saw you? He would wonder what little beggar girl we had picked up."

"Yet, I am your sister," said Milly, beginning to cry.

"Only our *step-sister*," said Dolly, with such emphasis, that it brought a conscious blush on more than one cheek among the audience. "Only our *step-sister*, and that makes a *vast* difference."

This scene ended after some more very pointed remarks on Dolly's part, by Cinderella being marched off, according to the original text, to dress her sisters' hair, and the curtain fell amid some applause.

It rose again in a few minutes, and discovered Milly (Cinderella) looking still more disconsolate and unhappy. She was not sitting on the coal-scuttle this time, but lying crying beside it. Her pretty hair was hanging over her face and hands. She was the very image of despair. Presently there came a tapping at the door; but the poor child scarce turned her head, though the tapping went

very vigorously on. Then entered the most wonderful figure that ever was seen. The old fairy, the godmother of the story; but the tallest fairy, and the funniest looking one, that imagination could conceive. She wore a high steeple-crowned hat, and a great ruff round her neck, and was otherwise dressed in a costume of about the time of Elizabeth, and she had a thick brown moustache, and a very rough chin, and was altogether a most remarkable looking personage.

"Why are you crying, my child?" she asked of Cinderella, tapping her shoulder with her long wand.

Then the sad tale was very prettily told. Cinderella was poor—Cinderella had been left, while the rich elder sisters had gone off to the ball.

"'Tis the way of the world," said the fairy. "Do not grieve, my dear child, the wheel of fortune ever is turning; but, of this be you sure, that when you are down you'll be snubbed, and when you are up you'll be flattered."

"It is very unjust," said Cinderella.

"Expect nothing else, Cinderella. There are certain great idols which men ever worship, and the greatest of these is of gold. For this they will toil, give their brains, their health and their honour. Your sisters are rich, so they naturally really despise you."

"I am sure if they were poor, and I were rich, I would not be quite so unkind," answered Cinderella, picking up a little bit of spirit.

"Are you so sure?" asked the fairy, severely.

"I am sure," replied Cinderella, confidently.

"Then we shall see," said the fairy, and tapped her wand thrice, and down came the curtain.

"Who is she?" inquired most of the little audience. "Who is the big fairy?" They were excited and awe-struck, and George's fairy was a decided success.

In a few minutes up went the curtain again, but how changed was the scene. In the centre stood Milly, but no longer the poor drudge of the household. She was dressed in the dress she had longed for—white, all covered with stars; she had flowers in her beautiful hair, and flowers in her hand, and round her white neck there were pearls, and on her small feet were *glass slippers*.

"Yes, real glass slippers!" the children all cried. You could see them shine in the gas-light as she stood there radiant, lovely and happy, with her godmother standing beside her, bidding her go to the ball, but be sure not to act like her sisters.

What clapping of hands there was, what applause for the beautiful Milly; but far more when again the old fairy tapped thrice with her wand, and a small glass coach, driven by the tiny boy in livery,

who had carried the placard, and who now wore a large cocked hat, and had a great bouquet in his button-hole, and drawn by George's Newfoundland-dog "Ben," came slowly upon the stage, to take Cinderella to the hall.

The children screamed with delight at this novel steed, but it must be confessed the fairy's heart sank, and had very little confidence in poor "Ben's" behaviour, who, however, acted his part to perfection; only looking somewhat reproachfully at his master for making a fool of him, but stopping obediently at the word of command, and otherwise conducting himself with every propriety.

Then the fairy, with much sage advice, and many hits at the manners of modern belles, handed Cinderella into her carriage, having first warned her that if she stayed till the clock struck twelve, which she considered much too late an hour for young people to be out, that all her fine clothes and coach would instantly vanish; after which warning the fairy herself disappeared, and "Ben," with the glass coach attached, was driven steadily off the stage behind the scenes, where George with some relief handed out his rather frightened little sister from her somewhat precarious vehicle, she being now supposed to have arrived at the Prince's ball.

When the curtain drew up again, the ball was at its height. There were about a dozen little

couples of boys and girls waltzing merrily together, and among them was one very conspicuous figure. It was the Prince, and a very beautiful young Prince he appeared. He was tall and slight, and wore a little violet velvet cap trimmed with miniver and a long white feather on his shapely head. He had a violet velvet mantel which reached the ground and was trimmed with miniver, like his cap, and his shoes had diamond buckles, and his cap a diamond star. No wonder all the ladies admired him. No wonder Dolly with whom he was dancing was looking very tenderly up into his face. But presently she started, and bit her lips and frowned, and the Prince's eyes following her angry glances, beheld the loveliest young creature in the world, who had just entered the room, and for whom, of course, he instantly conceived the most violent affection. It was Cinderella, the despised sister, the poor drudge, who sat amid the coals, and the cruel sisters' cheeks turned pale with envy when the beautiful Prince very politely handed her to a chair, and went up to the new-comer, smiling very sweetly, and taking off his cap. Then these two began to dance, though certainly with no extraordinary vigour; the glass slippers, being, in fact, inconvenient. George had had them made for Milly with much care, but still there was no denying they were uncomfortable for dancing. Milly had

to whisper this to her handsome partner, so in place of any violent exertion, they carried on a pretty little bye-play; no bad imitation of that business which balls were probably originally invented to forward.

This flirtation went on for a little while, and the Prince seemed to be getting very sweet, and the other ladies very angry, when the clock began to strike! Cindrella started and turned pale. One, two, three, four, went on the clock; five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, *eleven*, and with a shriek at that number the Prince's fair partner fled—fled ere the last fatal stroke, but dropped in her haste a glass slipper!

This the Prince took up and kissed, and placed in his bosom, and then the curtain descended, leaving him looking very sentimental and pretty.

Then came the last scene of all. The small boy in livery came on the stage at first, and read the Prince's offer. He would marry the lady whose foot would go into that wonderful glass shoe.

They acted this well. All the little girls who had danced came on and sat in a row; all tried to force on the small glass slipper in vain. Dolly's efforts were highly amusing, for she threw no small amount of humour into her part. How she pulled in her silk stocking at the toe; how she struggled

and fumed, and cried, "Oh! my corn, my corn!" but still all in vain.

We all know how the story ends; how poor Cinderella came last, and how her little foot slipped into her fairy godmother's shoe. Then the band (the piano) struck up a triumphal march, and the Prince embraced her, and the curtain fell, the Prince holding her to his bosom as his promised bride.

The applause was loud and long, and there were cries for "the Prince," "the Prince," "Cinderella," and "the Fairy;" so, after some hesitation, George led the two principal performers on the stage, and stood holding a hand of each, and bowing his comical head to the company.

"Bravo for the Prince!" cried a voice from the end of the room, and Miss Williams (his representative) looking to see who was her admirer, saw a pale handsome young man standing by Adelaide Manners' side.

"Who is that?" she asked of George in a whisper.

"Why, it's Hugh!—Hugh Manners," he answered. "I must go round to shake hands with him;—I wonder when he came?" and thus ended the children's Christmas play.



CHAPTER VIII.

SIR HUGH MANNERS.

AS soon as George had changed his ridiculous costume, he went round at once to welcome his cousin. He did so with much cordiality. There was the strong bond of kinsmanship between these two men, as well as that of early association and regard, and if Sir Hugh Manners admitted one human friendship to his heart, it certainly was for his cousin George.

"Well, old fellow," he said, shaking the hand which so warmly grasped his own, "you see I came without an invitation when I heard of your festivities. Allow me to congratulate you—you were eminently ridiculous."

"I succeeded in my aim, then," said George good-naturedly. "I meant to make the children laugh, and I'm glad I did."

"You made me, at any rate," answered Sir Hugh, "and horribly jealous too. I see through your dodge, Cousin George."

"What dodge, I should like to know?"

"Your sisters have a remarkably pretty governess."

"She is good-looking," replied George, with affected indifference.

"She is," said Sir Hugh, laughing. "Pray do me the honour to introduce me."

"Very well," answered George, trying not to look annoyed; "but I must tell you, Hugh—she is—a very lady-like person."

Sir Hugh laughed again, and shrugged his shoulders, and then turned carelessly round and began to talk to Adelaide Manners, who had been standing near, and had overheard his conversation with George.

"I have something to say to you, Hugh," she said in a half-whisper as George walked away, "something about that person."

"What, about the governess?"

"Yes—George is infatuated with her, I think. He has quarrelled with me for something or other which I did to offend her, and he is for ever with her and the children."

"Bah!" and Sir Hugh gave a glance of infinite contempt. "Surely, Adelaide, *you* are not so foolish as to think George means any nonsense."

"I do not know what he means," answered Adelaide, gravely, "but I know he has been so

changed and capricious lately, that I think I could believe anything of him."

"He is amusing himself," said Sir Hugh, with his cold smile.

"I do not know that."

"He shows some taste too, I think. She seems uncommonly pretty."

"No, she is not, really. She often looks so worn and faded. Of course to-night, dressed up, and I dare say painted, she does look pretty well."

"Don't admit it, Adelaide," said Sir Hugh, smiling.

"Why should I not?" answered Adelaide, angrily. "What is it to me whether she is pretty or not, except as regards George?"

"Console yourself, my dear; I dare say he found it exceedingly hard to pass the Sundays here before she came, and was glad of any little diversion."

"But there is something I want to ask you about her, if you will only be serious," said Miss Manners. "Do you know anything of Colonel Ross of the 3rd?"

"Colonel James Ross?" asked Sir Hugh, now looking at his cousin with some curiosity.

"Yes—I believe it was James; but at all events the regiment was the 3rd. Was Colonel Ross the colonel when you were in it?"

"What has he to do with her?" answered Sir Hugh, parrying the question.

"His wife, Mrs. Ross, was her only reference."

"Colonel Ross is in India," said Sir Hugh. "Is Mrs. Ross there now also?"

"Yes, the letter of reference was dated from Calcutta."

"I know them," said Sir Hugh, after a short pause.

"Was she a lady?" asked Adelaide, eagerly.

"As far as I can remember, she was."

Adelaide bit her lip. "There is something strange about Miss Williams," she went on. "She dresses splendidly—as if she were an heiress instead of a governess."

"I shall have a good look at her by-and-by," answered Sir Hugh; "but wont you have some tea or something? I see the young people are refreshing themselves over there."

He moved away as he spoke—going up to the table where Mrs. Manners and Lady Lilbourne, assisted by two maid-servants, were very busily engaged pouring out tea and coffee for the children, who were crowding round them, waiting for the forms to be removed in preparation for the dance which they had been promised.

"Well, Sir Hugh," said Lady Lilbourne, "and what do you think of it?"

"I think it was jolly for small children," he answered. "Mrs. Manners, that Dolly of yours will turn out a very clever young woman some of these days."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mrs. Manners, humbly. "She's too sharp, I'm afraid."

"Uncommonly sharp, I should say; and what a lovely child the third is—what is her name? Ah, to be sure, Millicent. She will be the belle of the Mannerses."

The fond mother sighed. "She is very delicate, I am afraid, Sir Hugh," she said.

"She'll outgrow it," he answered carelessly, and then went on talking to Lady Lilbourne.

Katie, Dolly, and Milly now came into the room, Milly still wearing the longed-for white dress with its golden stars, and the children all gathered round them, laughing and talking about the play; and by-and-by the piano was brought forward, and Miss Howard, Lady Lilbourne's governess, commenced playing a set of quadrilles.

"May I have the honour?" said Sir Hugh, turning to Adelaide Manners, whilst the little boys were eagerly choosing their partners; and she, with a bright flush suddenly crossing her face, placed her hand upon her cousin's arm.

When they were dancing the set, George and Miss Williams entered the room.

"He positively has been to the Vicarage with her, I believe," said Adelaide, pointing them out to her partner; "and did you ever see anything so preposterous as her dress?"

"Happy fellow!" answered Sir Hugh. "I wonder if he has been acting the lady's-maid?"

"How can you jest about such a thing, Hugh?"

"All life is but a jest, my dear."

"Sometimes a very bitter one," answered Adelaide.

Sir Hugh laughed, and then fixed his eyes steadily on Miss Williams' face. As he did so, a strange smile stole over his lips. A scornful one was habitual to them, but this was mixed with curiosity and surprise.

"Colonel Ross's letter was from Calcutta, you said, did you not?" he asked. "What was the date?"

"Yes," said Adelaide, who had been eagerly watching his face. "Do you know anything of her? Can she have been there? I can find the letter, and tell you when it was written."

Sir Hugh smiled again, but made no answer, still keeping his keen eyes fixed upon the governess's face.

"Keep your mind easy, Adelaide," he said, after having gazed at her thus for some moments. "George will never marry her."

"You know something of her, Hugh?" asked Adelaide, pale with excitement.

For a second Sir Hugh hesitated, and then he said, in his usual manner—

"I know she is an exceedingly pretty woman, Adelaide, and now I am going to make George jealous. I am going to dance with her."

As soon as the quadrille was over he kept his word; and leaving his cousin with a little nod, he crossed the room and went up to the corner where Miss Williams was standing, with George by her side.

"George," he said, addressing him, "will you do me the honour of introducing me to—this lady?"

"Certainly," answered George, looking anything but pleased. "Miss Williams, allow me to present to you Sir Hugh Manners."

"May I have the honour of dancing with the beautiful young Prince?" said Sir Hugh, bowing very low.

"I am sorry," said Miss Williams, quietly but smiling, "that the Prince cannot have the pleasure."

"If it is not presuming too far, may I inquire the reason?" asked Sir Hugh.

"I am going to play for the children," answered Miss Williams. "We have already encroached too much on Miss Howard's kindness."

“But one dance surely you can spare me?”

“I have promised one already,” she replied, with a smile, glancing at George.

“Lucky man!” said Sir Hugh, laying his hand on his cousin’s shoulder; but George moved impatiently under his kinsman’s touch.

“I must go to the piano now,” said Miss Williams, rising, and bowing slightly to the two gentlemen.

“Allow me to escort you,” said Sir Hugh, offering his arm, and leading her across the room, whilst George’s eyes followed them as they went.

When they reached the piano, and Sir Hugh was stooping down to arrange her music, Miss Williams, for the first time, looked earnestly at his face, and an expression of almost fear stole over her own as she did so; but it was only for a moment, for the next Sir Hugh glanced sharply up and smiled, as if conscious of her examination, and with a burning blush Miss Williams turned away her head.

“How do you like this charming place?” he said, addressing her. “Don’t you find it uncommonly cold?”

“I like it,” she answered, “and they have all been so kind to me—all at least, except——”

“Except Adelaide, of course; but I suppose you put that down to its proper cause. Since the

world began, I wonder was there ever one pretty woman who was not jealous of another."

"I do not consider Miss Manners pretty."

"She's not, but she thinks she is, and that's about the same thing; and then she is what you call a fine-looking girl."

Miss Williams was silent.

"And Cousin George?" went on Sir Hugh, "is he handsome?"

"He is good-looking, I think," replied Miss Williams.

"I envy George, though I'm not in general given to that vice," said Sir Hugh; "but it strikes me he must have had a remarkably pleasant time of it for the last month or two."

"How do you mean?"

"Being so much with you, of course."

"But perhaps he has not."

"But perhaps he has," answered Sir Hugh, with a bow.

"But he lives in Oldcastle, you know," said Miss Williams, "not here."

"Yes—he buys and sells; he 'maketh haste to get rich.' What is it the Scripture saith? I know what my money does, I am sure."

"What is that?"

"Taketh to itself wings—the deuce knows where to."

"The children are ready, Sir Hugh," said Miss

Williams, looking round ; "had you not better seek a partner ?"

"Which means, Sir Hugh be kind enough to leave my elbow."

"Yes."

"All the pretty ones are engaged," answered Sir Hugh, carelessly glancing over his shoulders, "and I should rather stay where I am."

"Then you must excuse me not talking to you," said Miss Williams, beginning to play her set of Lancers.

Surely a child's party is a pretty sight. Those fair-haired little girls and boys, those smooth and rosy cheeks, at least are pleasant to the eyes ; but Sir Hugh, after watching them for a moment or two, turned indifferently away.

"They say children are so innocent and happy," he said, "but what a farce it is. Half these little devils are I daresay hating each other just now. There is a boy over yonder in velvet knickerbockers scowling at Willie Lilbourne, who is dancing with Milly Manners. She's a beautiful child. Here's jealousy, hatred, backbiting, and lying. Just like a grown-up party, I declare, Miss Williams. Miniature little men and women, every one of them."

"What makes you so bitter?" she asked.

"I don't mean to be bitter ; I am only speaking what I think."

"What makes you think so bitterly then?"

"I have lived nine-and-twenty years, Miss Williams—that is a sufficient answer."

"When you grow older, perhaps you'll grow more amiable."

"I'll get doting in time, I've no doubt. I'll adore my grandchildren and hate my own; it's the regular course of humanity."

"Some men do not feel like that."

"I'm not a good boy, I suppose," answered Sir Hugh.

"Do you try to be?" said Miss Williams.

"Not I—not I indeed—I do well enough for my companions."

"Your cousin would not say that."

"George is a paragon, of course; George has also some motives of action which are too far out of our reach either to be my aim or my belief."

"I think he tries to be a good man."

"Can you turn round and look at him just now? By Jove! he doesn't look like a saint I can tell you at the present moment. He looks," added Sir Hugh, with a little laugh, "as if he would uncommonly like to cut my throat."

"Perhaps you deserve it."

"For trying to cut him out, eh? Is that what you mean?"

"No, it is not."

"Don't frown so horribly. It doesn't suit you. I assure you I didn't mean to say anything that was not—well, what shall I call it?—not polite."

Bang, bang, bang, went Miss Williams' fingers. Tralla, tralla, tralla, of the last figure of the Lancers; playing, it must be confessed, a wrong note or two occasionally in her energy.

"What wonderful strength you display," said Sir Hugh, watching her.

"There's the end of it, at any rate," said Miss Williams, turning round. "I wonder how the poor children have been able to dance to it; I have been playing abominably."

"I have been talking to you too much."

"Just so—I told you to go away, you know."

"You see what it is to be too—charming."

"How can you be so absurd?" said Miss Williams, and she rose rather impatiently from the music-stool.

Miss Howard came up to her. "Let me play next," she said, good-naturedly, and Miss Williams, who was tired and heated, was glad to give up her place.

"You will dance this with me, now?" said Sir Hugh.

"I promised the first dance I did dance to your cousin George."

"Where's the happy fellow then? Ah, there

he is, making fierce love to Lady Lilbourne. I shall have to warn my good friend the worthy baronet."

"He will be coming presently, I daresay," said Miss Williams; but George showed no signs of doing so, or of remembering his engagement to the pretty governess. He was standing with his back to the company, talking apparently with great interest to Lady Lilbourne, and he never turned round when the music for the next dance began.

"He isn't coming," said Sir Hugh, presently. "You had better take a turn with me."

But Miss Williams had no wish to offend, or even annoy George, and she therefore declined.

"No," she said, "I will wait for my partner."

Just then George glanced round, and his cousin beckoned to him to come.

"My dear fellow," he said, as George rather slowly approached them, "here is a young lady waiting for you most anxiously; steadily refusing the most pressing offers of your humble servant; and yet you come as tardily as if you were suffering from a most severe attack of the gout."

"I thought you seemed very well engaged," said George, looking at Miss Williams.

There was a flush on his dark face, and an angry light in his eyes, as he said this, and Miss Williams saw that something had greatly annoyed him.

"I was only waiting patiently for you," she said, with a smile, rising, and putting her hand upon his arm.

"Well, and how do you think it has gone off?" she asked in the first pause of the dance, as they stood side by side.

"Oh, tolerably well—just what I expected. These things almost always end in being a bore, I think," replied George.

Miss Williams looked up at her partner in surprise as he said this.

"I thought you were enjoying it so much," she said.

"I hope you are?" inquired George.

"Yes I am—but what is the matter? Something has vexed you, I am sure. Wont you tell me what it is?"

"I'm not vexed—only rather tired."

"I'm sorry for that."

"Oh, you'll get some one else to amuse you; there's Hugh—he's always game for anything of that sort."

A smile stole over Miss Williams' pretty lips as George Manners said this; she was beginning to see what had ruffled his temper.

"Sir Hugh is very agreeable," she remarked.

"Very. He's quite a lady's man. If a woman's

good-looking, and ready to flirt with him, Hugh is always willing."

Miss Williams laughed. "How does he show he's willing?" she said.

"Like other men, I suppose, Miss Williams—by looking like a fool—only he don't feel one."

"It's all looks with him, then?"

George scowled at her as she said this, for Miss Williams could not help laughing again.

"What is amusing you so much?" he asked, half savagely.

"Your description of Sir Hugh."

"Perhaps you'll find it to be a true one."

"It is a matter of no interest to me, at any rate," she said; "give me your arm, I've something to tell you."

It was only some little foolish tale about the children, but she wanted to please him again; wanted to make him feel happy; and after a few gentle confidential words, a few kindly inquiries, George's brow cleared. He was in love with her, poor fellow, and if he tried ever so hard—if he had given his life to resist her, he could not.

"What was the matter with you a few minutes ago?" she asked, presently.

"I—I—was a jealous fool, I think," said George penitently; and Sir Hugh, watching them, saw their little coldness was over.

“What a clever minx it is,” he thought admiringly; “she can twist that big fellow round her little finger if she likes; but I must spoil her game, I think—I would be sorry if anything were to happen to George—though, deuce take it, why should I?”





CHAPTER IX.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

THAT fellow Hugh asked himself to dinner to-day, Nelly," said the Vicar to his wife, the next morning at breakfast.

"Well, my dear, I'm sure we'll be very glad to see him," replied Mrs. Manners.

A soft pink shade crept over Adelaide Manners' pale cheeks during this conversation, while George, standing by the window, looking very noble and handsome, turned round with his bad-tempered look (as the children called it) coming very quickly over his face.

"That was cool of him, I must say," he said.

"Why, I thought you and Hugh were such friends," answered the Vicar, with a chuckle. He knew perfectly well what had displeased his son, and rather enjoyed any exhibition of the weakness of human nature.

"Oh, we're friendly enough," said George, shortly.

"He seemed to admire Miss Williams last night," said the Vicar, with a pleasant smile.

"I daresay," answered George.

"He did nothing of the kind," said Miss Manners, who had neither much temper or discretion. "He—he—perhaps he knows something more of her than he chooses to tell."

"What do you mean by that?" asked George, angrily and abruptly.

"Just what I said," answered Adelaide, her blush deepening into scarlet.

"I wouldn't show it so openly, if I were you women," sneered George. "I'd try, I think, to hide my jealousy of every better-looking woman than myself a little more than you do."

"But I don't consider her better-looking," said Adelaide; "and as for being jealous!—jealous of a governess—a nursery governess! I've not quite fallen so low, George—and a woman, too, of——"

"Of what?" said George, looking at his sister steadily.

"How do we know who or what she is?" answered Adelaide in a loud tone, and trembling with passion; "coming here dressed like a princess, and giving herself all the airs and graces of a fine lady. You may storm and rage if you like, George—but Hugh knows something about her he

wont tell—something against her ; I saw it in his face.”

“ Amiable children,” said the Vicar, looking from one to the other.

George’s face had flushed a deep red while his sister was speaking; but with a certain effort of will, of which he was quite capable, he now restrained himself.

“ You had better take care what you say, Adelaide,” he said, in a moment or two, quietly but significantly ; “ and as for Hugh, he shall answer to me for any insinuation which he has chosen to make ;” and with these words he abruptly quitted the room.

“ You have made a nice row with your folly, Adelaide,” said the Vicar.

“ What do I care ?” she answered, defiantly ; but just at this moment the door opened, and Miss Williams quietly entered.

“ Come beside the fire,”—said the Vicar, rising and shaking her hand, and endeavouring to conceal they had been talking of her, for he was a gentleman in manner ; “ this frosty morning is cold.”

“ A happy Christmas, my dear ; let me cut you some cake,” said the kindly hostess in a flurry ; but Adelaide gave no greeting, but rose disdainfully from the table, and went towards the window and stood looking out upon the snow ; and somehow,

with that strange consciousness of the unseen which we possess, Miss Williams felt that her entrance had been ill-timed.

"To return to the subject which your little discussion interrupted, Adelaide," said the Vicar in a few minutes; "Hugh offered to dine here, and the question is, what time shall we dine—early, I suppose?"

"We cannot do that if Hugh comes," said Adelaide, turning hastily round. "Surely, papa, you would not ask him to sit down to a two o'clock dinner?"

"My sirloin is a prime one, I expect," said the Vicar, "and the turkey is splendid, isn't it, Nelly? I shall be hungry after my sermon, and, therefore, quite ready to enjoy my dinner as usual. Which, therefore, is the most proper course, Miss Williams? Should an old man like me alter his ways to suit a young man like my nephew, or the reverse?"

"The reverse, I should say," answered Miss Williams, with a smile.

"That is my opinion; so write a line to your cousin, Adelaide, and tell him he must e'en eat his dinner at the time which suits his old uncle."

"I cannot do it, papa. You might, I think, wait a few hours, when Hugh is so seldom here. He cannot dine in the middle of the day."

"He has his remedy, my dear; he can stay at home," said Mr. Manners, with a laugh.

"We'll fix it afterwards," said Mrs. Manners. "Don't let us talk of it any more just now. Is Milly awake yet, Miss Williams? I do hope she is not very tired."

"Oh no, she looks quite bright," replied Miss Williams. "They enjoyed themselves so much last night."

"You did it remarkably well," said the Vicar, "very well; Dolly was excellent. And what do you think of Sir Hugh, then, Miss Williams?"

"I think he has singularly handsome features," replied the governess.

"Yes, Hugh will make a very personable corpse. He doesn't depend on complexion," pleasantly remarked Mr. Manners.

"It was India made him so pale," said Adelaide. "India nearly always changes the appearance. Don't you think so, Miss Williams?"

As Miss Manners said this she fixed her eyes steadily on Miss Williams' face, who perceptibly winced and moved uneasily under her gaze.

"Don't you think India is very trying?" Adelaide asked again.

"I—I do not know," answered Miss Williams, with slight hesitation.

"Oh, I thought perhaps you might;" and with

this last random shot Adelaide walked out of the room.

"Adelaide has got up on the wrong side of the bed, as they say about here, I think," said the Vicar, as soon as she had taken her departure. "It is hard to say whether George or she are the sweetest in temper."

"She vexes George, Arthur, by what she says," answered Mrs. Manners. "George is really very good-tempered."

"George is my boy, my eldest, my paragon," said the Vicar, with a good-natured nod at his wife. "That's what this good woman thinks a hundred times a day, Miss Williams. Did you ever see such a model stepmother as she is?"

"He has been a good son to me," said Mrs. Manners. "I want no other."

"I hope not, my dear," replied the Vicar solemnly.

"Oh fie, Vicar, how you talk. He's proud of George himself, Miss Williams, only he wont let on."

"He wont *what*, my dear?"

"I've made a mistake, I dare say," said Mrs. Manners meekly, her rosy cheeks growing a little redder; "but never mind—if the heart's in the right, a slip o' the tongue doesn't matter much; does it Miss Williams?"

"No, indeed."

"I declare there are the bells," cried the Vicar, rising. "Run like a good woman, Nelly, and bring me my sermon. It is lying on the desk, and is marked Christmas sermon, and has seen a good many before this."

Meanwhile George, hot-tempered and disturbed, was breasting against the cutting north-east wind, and plunging knec-deep at times among the heavy snow, which had drifted up amid the hilly shore.

Far away rolled the great ocean, storm-tossed, at his feet, but George was in no humour to admire the beauties of the wintry sea. In his heart anger, love, jealousy, and doubt were struggling for the mastery; and he clenched his hands and bit his lips when he recalled his sister's hateful words. What did Adelaide mean? Had Hugh really known anything against her? Perhaps known her. Oh! what a pang stabbed into his heart at the very thought. "I would kill her, I think," he said between his teeth, "kill her, if I thought it."

"Why has he come here to disturb my peace?" he went on passionately. "I meant to be a good husband to her—to love her, and shield her in my arms for ever; but now, I hate him; I think I hate him, with his false, pale face."

Ding-dong, ding-dong, came through the frosty air. It was the old church bell ringing for the

Christmas service; and George started when he heard it, stopped, and listened.

"My God!" he thought, "do I call myself a Christian, and have such thoughts as these to-day;" and he lifted up his eyes to the cold grey sky, with what solemn yearning, self-condemnation, and reproach!

"Why are we shut out," he said, "shut out by the passions and temptations of our hearts?"

For a few moments he stood still, struggling with evil, striving for good; then that which is ever strongest, if we only earnestly seek it, prevailed.

"I will go to church," he said; "go to church first, and then will ask Hugh what he meant—in a different spirit, I hope, than I could now."

The service was far advanced when he entered the church. The Vicar was reading the Gospel in his rich, strong voice: "He came unto his own, but his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believed on his name;" and poor George bowed his head, praying perhaps for the belief which would enable him to obtain this blessed inheritance.

After a while the Vicar ascended the pulpit, and preached a very excellent and appropriate sermon. His son had often heard it before. He remembered the serious and the touching parts; remembered

the very expression of face which the Vicar thought suitable for the occasion.

"Oh! my brethren, will you not accept this gracious offer——" George knew that at the moment his father said this he was most probably thinking of his dinner; knew how he had grumbled at putting it off; knew, in fact, his selfish old heart. Surely example is better than precept, and the rough plain words of a good man more powerful than all the rounded and eloquent sentences of some learned divines. George naturally did not believe much in his father's preaching, and the most solemn and holy words scarcely now sounded solemn or holy from his lips.

"He should not have been a parson," thought his son, with a half-smile. "Poor father! yet he is a good fellow after all."

He waited for him till he came out of the vestry, and only gave the children and their governess a smile and a nod as they passed the almost last pew in the church in which he was seated.

"Are you not coming?" whispered Dolly; but he shook his head, and sat still till his father was ready; putting his arm through the Vicar's with friendly affection.

"Well, George, and so you were a good boy and came to church after all," said the Vicar, who was pleased at him waiting.

"To be sure," answered George; "and now I am going up to see Hugh."

"He's coming to dinner—at six; for I had to give in to the women, confound them! Fancy after preaching—I can't fast till then; and I'll just be spoiling my dinner by eating your mother's plum cake! Disgusting!—spoiling one's dinner indeed, and one's digestion as well, for a fellow like that."

"He is the head of the house," said George, laughing.

"The head be hanged then," answered the Vicar, who was in a very bad humour. "I don't see why he should come. We would have been jollier without his white face, and his sneers at the table."

"We could not well have let him dine alone to-day," said George kindly, for his heart was softened. "Good-bye till dinner then, father; and mind you don't spoil it by too much Christmas loaf and pale sherry;" and, nodding to the Vicar, George turned off on his way to the Hall.

His heart softened still more towards his cousin as he approached the old house. How a thousand times he had gone up that broad smooth avenue—how a thousand times had been welcomed by the kindly old master, who was lying in his grave. He remembered all the Christmases he had spent there; remembered their chases among the leafless

trees; their shouts, their laughter, and their falls; and there was but Hugh now—but Hugh, after poor, foolish, generous Walter had gone to his tragic fate.

He found his cousin, where he expected him, sitting in the library by a glorious fire, and languidly dawdling over a luxurious breakfast.

"Thanks, old fellow, for coming," said Sir Hugh, holding out his hand to his visitor. "I should wish you, shouldn't I, a merry Christmas and a happy new year? But as you're not likely to have them, I forbear."

"Well, we'll hope for the best," said George, cheerily enough. "Don't throw cold water on them beforehand, at any rate."

"'Twould be ice this morning, I think," said Sir Hugh. "By Jove, what a climate this is!"

"You are coming down to our place to dinner, aren't you?" said George.

"Yes; here's a note from Adelaide. You dine—at six, she says."

"Well, can you dine so early?"

"Don't be a fool, George," answered Sir Hugh, who was rather above most small affectations. "I can dine very well at any hour when I've got a good dinner to dine on. I only hope you have not waited for me. I remember on sermon days it used to be two o'clock at the Vicarage."

"Adelaide made a row about it at breakfast this morning," said George, laughing. "She said a fine gentleman like you couldn't dine in the middle of the day ; so I left the Vicar swearing over his endangered digestion."

"I'm sorry. Couldn't we have it early still?"

"Nonsense," said George, "I'm only joking ; of course not, old fellow ;" and he sat down on one of his cousin's armchairs by the fire as he spoke.

"Have a pipe?" said Sir Hugh, and the two men sat silent with their feet on the fender for the next quarter of an hour.

"I've something to say to you, Hugh," said George at length, getting up, and knocking the ashes of his pipe out upon the bar.

"Say on then, George."

"What was the—the nonsense you were talking to Adelaide last night?"

"What nonsense?"

"About—Miss Williams."

"I never talked any," said Sir Hugh.

"You said something—you inferred something, at least, did you not?"

"I said she was a very pretty woman ; I might have inferred—I thought her a jolly one."

"What do you mean by jolly?" said George, his face turning very red.

"A lively girl ; a light-hearted, lightsome young

creature, formed to cheer a man's dark hours, George; that's about what I inferred."

George could not help laughing at his cousin's expression as he said this.

"Was that all you said?" he asked. "Then what induced Adelaide to insinuate what she did?"

"My dear George, Adelaide is a—woman."

"A woman, in her sense then, means all sorts of malice and uncharitableness," said George, angrily, forgetting his good resolutions.

Sir Hugh shrugged his shoulders. "She is one," he said; "the pretty girl of whom we are talking is another."

"Not of her sort."

"They are all akin, George," answered Sir Hugh, with some bitterness; "all, all. I've known many women in my day, and they've all been worldly or false—except perhaps one poor girl."

"There has been one then, Hugh?" said George, with a smile.

"Yes," said Sir Hugh, slowly. "Yes, I think so; but then she has been brought up in a different school."

"What school?" asked George.

"Nature," said Sir Hugh, rising and going to the window. "Yon old roarer there," pointing to the blue sea-line visible from the window, "has been her godmother."

"You mean Peggy Richardson?" said George.

Sir Hugh nodded his head, and his cousin turned away with a kind of pained look upon his face, and began gazing into the fire; then suddenly looking round, he said in a low tone—

"Don't hurt the poor lass, Hugh; don't break poor Peggy's heart."

But Sir Hugh made him no answer. He was beating his fingers restlessly against the frosty panes, and he never looked round when his cousin spoke.

"Let us have some brandy," he said, in a few moments, "it freezes one to look upon the frozen world;" and with a shiver he came back and crouched down beside the blazing fire.

"You don't look strong, Hugh," said George, kindly. "I wish you would lead a different life."

"It's too late," answered Sir Hugh, gloomily; and George thought these words of his rich and handsome cousin, sitting there discontented and unhappy, were a better sermon than that which he had heard to-day.

By-and-by, however, Sir Hugh roused himself, and began talking after his careless fashion; showing some interest in George's occupations and success.

"It's good to be a money-grubber," he said.

"Do you know what I wish I'd been born, George? —one of the toilers of the soil."

"And what about the want and the misery?" said his cousin; "what about the workhouse, rheumatism, and old age."

"These are exceptional cases," said Sir Hugh.

"Not so much as you think, perhaps. No, Hugh, be thankful you have the means of doing some good still."

"And don't do it."

"You are a young man now," said George; "we'll wait till you have settled down before we will say that."

Sir Hugh made no reply to this, and with such idle talk the cousins whiled away the short winter day.

At dinner time they walked down to the Vicarage together, and found it all lighted and ready to receive them.

"How are you, Hugh?" said Adelaide, meeting them in the hall and holding out her hand; and after her cousin had shaken it, she held it towards her brother also, who took it in silent reconciliation.

"Don't let us have any more quarrelling to-day," she said.

"I wish for none, I am sure," said George kindly; and then they went up into the drawing-room,

where Mrs. Manners, comely and blooming in her best black silk, was waiting to welcome them.

Miss Williams and the children were there also ; for, as it was Christmas day, Mrs. Manners insisted that they should all dine together. So in a few minutes George was seated with a little sister on each knee, and Sir Hugh was complimenting Dolly on her decided success.

"Be an actress, Dolly, when you grow up," he said, "and you'll make your fortune."

"I thought they were rather odd people in general," answered Dolly, discreetly.

"You'd just suit them then," said Sir Hugh.

"I'm not odd," replied Dolly, sharply.

"Hum," said Sir Hugh, and Dolly was just beginning to look angry when dinner was luckily announced.

It was a very pleasant meal. The sirloin and turkey were perfect, the Vicar still hungry, and Sir Hugh, for him, wonderfully agreeable. His pale face was slightly flushed, and though he scarcely was witty, his conversation was pungent and clever. He was, in fact, a man of whom you did not grow weary, for though naturally selfish and vain, he was too well-bred and sarcastic to show it. He saw these faults too clearly in his friends for himself ever to indulge in them ; and his cousin Adelaide, who was sitting beside him, thought him to-day not

only an eligible match, but the most charming and handsome of men.

Near to him, looking a little pale and fatigued, but still very attractive and pretty, was Miss Williams. But Sir Hugh was merely polite to his neighbour, and seemed perfectly content while talking to Adelaide; and George, after watching his face with jealous anxiety, grew both light-hearted and lively.

"What a bugbear I have made out of nothing," he thought; "how foolish and stupid I have been."

Miss Williams, however, seemed ready to pardon all his shortcomings. She was more friendly and gentle than usual, George thought, and asked with interest about his plans and return.

"I'll have to go to London shortly," he said, "but I'll wait now till after the New-year."

"The New-year," said Sir Hugh, "to be sure, that's to-day week, isn't it? Let us have a return dinner then, Mrs. Manners. You'll all come, I hope, children included—come and dine with me that day at the Hall?"

"Not the little ones, I think, Sir Hugh," answered Mrs. Manners.

"Nonsense, let them all come. You would like to come, wouldn't you, Dolly?"

"I'm not a little one, Hugh."

"I beg your pardon; you're a middling one, ain't you? Well, Miss Pert, will you come?"

"No, I wont."

"Poor Dolly," answered Sir Hugh, who delighted in teasing her. "She wont see the Christmas tree, then, I'm going to have down from town on purpose. She wont get a lovely present off the branches, or a little pink wax candle. Poor Dolly!"

"He's only teasing you, Dolly; don't mind him," said Miss Williams, for Dolly was looking ready to cry.

"I don't," said Dolly; but Sir Hugh was tired of it already.

"George," said he, turning away, "when do you go to Oldcastle? I want you to do a little commission for me."

"Come with me, Hugh, instead," answered George. "I start to-morrow."

"Thank you, but I do not wish for any more smoke just at present. I came for a little fresh air to the country, and I mean to try to inhale it."

"Sitting over the fire?" said George, with a smile.

"I'm going to shoot wild ducks to-morrow," answered Sir Hugh. "But when will you be back?"

"Yesterday week. New-year's eve. Come down, Hugh, and we'll sit out the old one," said George.

"We'll see; but you'll do what I ask, wont you? I want to get up something to please the young ladies."

"What will you get up really, Hugh, on New-year's day?" asked both Katie and Milly almost in a breath, running up to their cousin the moment he appeared in the drawing-room for tea.

"It's a secret," he answered, "and there's Dolly isn't coming at all."

"Oh! but I am though," replied Dolly. "Miss Williams says you are only chaffing."

"And what does Miss Williams mean by chaffing?" said Sir Hugh, walking up to a low seat by the fire on which that young lady was sitting.

"What Sir Hugh Manners does sometimes, I should say," answered Miss Williams, smiling and fanning herself with a hand-screen.

"I've seen nothing of you to-day," said Sir Hugh.

"No."

"I hope I shall though this next week."

"You will be down here sometimes, I suppose."

"Yes—and you will walk out—sometimes, I suppose."

"Not much this cold weather."

"Doesn't it suit you? You have been used to warmer climates, perhaps?"

"I—I—have never been so far north before."

"You've been abroad though?"

"Yes—what makes you say that?"

Sir Hugh gave a little shrug.

"What makes one know a hundred things," he said, "that one doesn't know, or shouldn't at least. Life is a strange teacher, Miss Williams."

"One can learn its lessons in different ways, it is said."

"Ay, to be sure. The good way and the bad. Is that what you mean?"

"I mean that we see things pretty much through the colouring of our own minds, I think."

"You mean that a good man sees all things in a good light—even a fellow picking his pocket, I presume."

"You are too bad."

"I won't argue any more," said Sir Hugh. "They tell me you sing; come and sing a song for me."

"I would rather you asked Miss Manners to play. She plays beautifully."

"I know. I know in fact all her performances by heart."

"How is that?"

"I've heard them practised. Didn't you know she lived all her life with my mother? But here

is George. Well, Prince George, is the reverend governor asleep yet?"

"Just about it," replied George.

"The way you and he were pitching into the old port was something terrible to a sickly man like me. So you are not coming back for a week. What shall we do to amuse ourselves, Miss Williams, when he is away?"

George Manners winced as his cousin said this.

"You'll be shooting, I suppose," he said.

"Sometimes; but a man gets weary of one thing. I shall come down and practise charades, or whatever you call them, with Miss Williams here, I think."

"Indeed."

"Follow your example, my fine fellow. Lady Lilbourne was talking of getting up something of the sort last night. I'll ride over and keep her up to the idea."

"You'd better ask Miss Williams first, hadn't you?"

"I have. You are quite agreeable, aren't you, Miss Williams?"

"Really, Sir Hugh, you had better state facts."

"Well, are you not? Would you not like better now receiving the respectful admiration of—what shall I say—well, of the surrounding gentry

than sitting cooped up in the schoolroom here, teaching my dear little cousins to read?"

Both George and Miss Williams laughed, as Sir Hugh said this; but the next minute, with some decision of manner, Miss Williams said—

"Don't mention me, Sir Hugh, to Lady Lilbourne, if you talk of getting anything up, for I really am not going to act." And then, rising from her seat, she went over to the couch on which Mrs. Manners was sitting.

"I am glad you have come beside me, my dear," said that lady, making room for her.

"I am always glad to come," answered Miss Williams.

"It's natural, of course, that the young men should like to talk to you," hesitated Mrs. Manners; "but I don't think Adelaide likes it."

"I—I am sorry."

"She doesn't like Sir Hugh doing it, at any rate; or, I think," added Mrs. Manners, with a kindly smile, "does George."

"I should be sorry to annoy him," said Miss Williams, with a blush.

"You like him, and no wonder. George is a young man you will not see in a thousand."

"He is your favourite."

"Yes. Well, Georgie;" for at this moment George Manners left his cousin and crossed the

room, and came up to the couch on which his step-mother and Miss Williams were sitting. "We were just talking of you," went on Mrs. Manners.

"Were you abusing me?" said George, smiling and taking a seat by Miss Williams's side.

"I am glad you are not going to act any more," he said in a low tone to her. "Don't let Hugh persuade you to do it."

"You must not think that he could."

"He is called a very fascinating man, you know, Amy."

"I shall have to take care then," said Miss Williams, laughing.

"Don't even say that—don't, child, I cannot endure it."

"How can you be so foolish?"

George gave a restless sigh. "I wish I could not," he said.

"He admires your sister, I think," went on Miss Williams.

"I don't know—Adelaide thinks so; but I don't. By-the-bye, I won't see you in the morning, I suppose?"

"What time do you start?"

"Ever so early—in the six train."

"Then I'm afraid you will not."

"I must go, then, for I have an important appointment at the office at ten; so I shall have

to say good-bye to night. Where are you off to, mother?"

"I'm going to see after your father," said Mrs. Manners, with a little nod.

"There goes a good woman," said George, looking after her as she left them. "She is fond of you too, Amy; she wont make any objections, I think."

"What do you mean?" said Miss Williams, uneasily.

"Must I tell you now?"

"No, no, I don't want to hear anything—don't want to hear anything to-night. I am dreadfully tired."

"Poor little woman."

"I wonder if Sir Hugh is going soon. I wish he would, for I cannot sit up much longer."

"Stay a few minutes, unless you really wish to go."

"I do really wish," said Miss Williams, wearily. "I cannot tell you how completely worn out I feel."

"I will open the door for you, then," said George, rising. "You need not say good night to the others."

They accordingly crossed the room together, and George opened the door for her; then hesitated, but the moment afterwards he followed her out.

"I have come to say good-night and good-bye," he said, addressing her, for she had already begun to ascend the stairs; but she turned as he spoke, and came back holding out her hand.

"Good night," she said, "good-night, Mr. Manners."

"Call me something else for once—something that I may take away with me."

"Good night, George."

"Good night, Amy," said he, taking both her hands, "good night, dear Amy."

"Well, good night again," said she, trying to release them.

"Not yet—stop one moment; you wont forget me all this week, will you?"

"Not quite, I think."

"You little tease!" And he stooped down and kissed her hands, which she pulled quickly away, and fled upstairs to her bedroom.

"Poor George," she said, when she got there.

"Poor—poor George."





CHAPTER X.

SIR HUGH'S AMUSEMENTS.

THERE were chill days after Christmas—chill, bleak, wintry days, storm-laden and dangerous on the rocky Northumbrian coast. The fisher people could not get out sometimes for weeks upon the treacherous sea, and want, endured with the dogged silence of their nature, began to spread among the population by the shore.

In these hard times, as formerly, the Vicar's good wife was their friend and comforter, and soup twice a day was supplied in the Vicarage kitchen to all who came for it.

This of course greatly increased the household duties of Mrs. Manners, but she found a willing and kindly assistant in Miss Williams, who cheerfully gave both her time and attention to the good work of helping her neighbours, and Sir Hugh declared she was always so busy she never had any time now to talk to him.

He had, however, met her more than once during

the last few days, and had certainly done his best to attract her, but somehow he felt he scarcely succeeded, and Sir Hugh began to feel rather piqued at his failure, and to wonder what reason she could have for her coldness.

"She is in love with George, I believe," he thought one night as she left the room, shortly after his arrival at the Vicarage.

"Do you like her any better?" he said to Adelaide, who was standing beside him.

"No; why should I?" she answered, abruptly. "Do you?"

"I always liked her," replied Sir Hugh.

"Really, Hugh."

"Well, Adelaide?"

"Why do you say such a thing?" she said, half fiercely, half tenderly. "Why do you say it *to me*?"

"Why not, my dear child?"

"I hate to hear it," answered Adelaide, quickly. "Surely George is enough. Hugh, what was it you knew of her? Have you ever seen her before? Tell me to-night." And she laid her hand on his arm.

"What avails it to tell you?" he answered.

"It might avail much," said Adelaide. "It might even save George."

"He wont marry her."

"How do you know? He's deeply in love with her. Ellen, my maid, saw him kissing her hand, and I know not what, on Christmas day, when he followed her out of the drawing-room; you remember."

Sir Hugh laughed. "They flirt," he said; "there's no harm in that."

"George is not like you," urged Adelaide. "His ideas have fallen to his present station, I think. He is a man who would marry on a hundred a year, from any mistaken notion of honour."

"High-minded being."

"Hugh," said Adelaide, indignantly, "you make a jest of everything."

"Well, what is it you want to know? What is it you have taken into your head?"

"Who is this woman you all admire so much?" asked Adelaide, her hot temper rising as she spoke. "I am convinced you know something of her—tell me what it is."

"I have seen her before," said Sir Hugh.

"Where? Tell me where?" asked Adelaide, eagerly.

"It was in society somewhere," answered Sir Hugh, carelessly. "A fellow who has knocked about the world in a marching regiment as I have done, sees dozens of women whom he never remembers more in his day."

"But can you not try to recollect where it was?"

said Adelaide, coldly. She did not believe her cousin was speaking the truth.

"I can't just now. Will that satisfy you? How horribly curious you are, Adelaide."

"I—I—do not believe you," said Adelaide, turning away, with tears of disappointment and anger rising in her dark eyes.

"What a want of politeness, my dear."

"Hugh, you will regret this when too late," said Adelaide the next moment; "regret it when George makes a fool of himself—like papa—or worse."

"We'll wait till then, then Adelaide. But what is that extraordinary din which I hear going on at the back of the house?"

"It is the people coming for the soup, I suppose. Mrs. Manners will be getting a fever, or some other dreadful disease, among her lambs, with allowing all these dirty creatures to come about."

"Suppose for fun we go and look at the animals feeding?"

"Go if you like, but I have no taste for such disgusting sights."

"Mind you are in a better humour when I come back then," said Sir Hugh, and, nodding his head to his cousin, he coolly left the room.

He found the large, old-fashioned kitchen, which was built out at the back of the Vicarage, half full

of fisherwomen in their blue flannel costumes, who were crowding eagerly round a table where Mrs. Manners, Miss Williams, and two maid servants, were busily engaged dispensing the soup, which was standing in two huge iron pots smoking before them. Sir Hugh rather liked the study of human faces, and he stood back in the shade, and looked with some curiosity at those now before him.

There were young women, old women, and middle aged. Women of seventy, who went about the country with their heavy creels till they dropped, and pretty, famished-looking girls, with complexions as delicate as any lady's; but there was the same expression on nearly every face as they approached the savoury soup—a hungry, eager look of starvation, which gave a strange sort of feeling even to Sir Hugh Manners.

“How many of you are there here?” he said, coming forward with a smile of recognition to Mrs. Manners. “About twenty odd, isn't there? Well, will a couple of shillings to each do you any good to-night? Just to buy snuff with for yourselves—not for the good man, mind, Alsie.”

This was addressed to an old, white-haired fisherwoman, who had gone for more than thirty years to the Hall. Gone when Lady Manners was a bride; when the children had plagued her, and ridden in

her creel, yet had not come to the end of her long pilgrimage still.

She turned round as Sir Hugh spoke ; turned the handsome, withered old face, which he remembered so well all through these years.

" May the Lord bless you, hinny," she said, " for we are sorely pressed."

" Mrs. Manners does something for you, I see," said Sir Hugh, with a certain discomfort in his voice.

" She's fed us when we were hungry," said the old woman, solemnly ; " she has clothed us when we were naked. The Lord reward her according to her deeds."

" Don't say that, Alsie ; I've done but little," said Mrs. Manners, blushing scarlet.

" I'll say no more," answered Alsie, with the reserve of her class, " but others know as well as me."

" Ay," said the women around, " ay, we do that."

" The bairn in my arms had been cold but for the mistress," said a gaunt-looking woman who was standing near him, opening a frayed old shawl on her bosom and displaying a wasted, white-faced, sleeping child.

Sir Hugh turned away his head ; he did not like such sights.

"The spring is coming," he said, "you will all be rich soon."

"And would have starved meanwhile," answered the woman ; adding, beneath her breath, "had the world been full of such as *ye*."

Sir Hugh did not hear her last words, but something in her face, and in the way which she wrapped the old shawl again round her baby, showed her displeasure, and he was just thinking of leaving the kitchen, when the beautiful fisher-girl, Peggy Richardson, entered at the open door. For an instant a shade, slight and almost invisible, yet there, crossed his face when he saw her, but the next moment he addressed her with careless good humour.

"Well, Peggy," he said, "and how are you this cold night?—and how's the old man at home?"

When he spoke, the poor girl, who had not till then observed him, crimsoned to her very hair; crimsoned and started, and murmured some inaudible answer.

"I'm in the way, I can see, here among all this business," went on Sir Hugh. "Good night, Mrs. Manners, good night, Miss Williams, good night, Peggy. I'm off to smoke a cigar in the moonlight on the links;" and with a nod to the rest of the women he disappeared, and Peggy Richardson's dark-brown eyes followed him as he went.

"Well, Peggy," said Mrs. Manners, with peculiar kindness in her manner, "and so you've come for your soup?"

"Yes, mistress," said the girl, with a deep long sigh, turning to answer her.

"And your father, poor man, how's he this hard weather?"

"But badly; he's sorely pained at times."

"Ay," said the woman with the baby, with some bitterness, "ay, mistress, I tell her if she bided more with her poor rheumatic old father, and went less to meet yon fine gentleman who's just gone, it wad be more to her credit."

"Let me alone, will you, and mind your own business," retorted the girl, sullenly and indignantly. "If the mistress finds no fault with me, why should you?"

"I find no fault, Peggy," said Mrs. Manners, gravely. "It's not you, poor lass, I blame; but you've no mother, Peggy, and should take care."

"Don't mistress, don't!" cried poor Peggy, bursting into a fit of passionate sobbing, and covering her face with her hands, "don't speak kindly to me, *please*."

"The Lord forgive him, that's all I can say," said Mrs. Manners, under her breath. "Run, Miss Williams dear, and bring her a glass of wine—the poor lass is sore upset."

"That comes of your fine gentleman," said the woman who had spoken before.

"Hold your tongue, Becky, and don't meddle with what doesn't concern you," said Mrs. Manners, sharply. "And, Peggy, don't take on so; I didn't mean to hurt you."

"No, mistress," sobbed the poor girl, struggling to recover herself. "No, I know you didn't; but others do though—though it's no matter."

"You had better leave her," said Mrs. Manners to the rest of the women.

"No, no, I'll be better—am better now."

"Stay a little while," urged Mrs. Manners, kindly, "it will do you good."

"No," said the girl, as if anxious to be away; "no, father will be looking for his supper."

"Take this with you for him then, Peggy," said Mrs. Manners, pushing a bottle of whisky into her hand. "I expected you coming, and had it standing ready for you."

"I—I can't thank you," cried the girl, and drew her thin shawl round her lovely form. "God bless you, mistress," she added, pausing a moment and looking back with her tear-stained face. "God bless you—if I can't."

"Poor Peggy!" said Mrs. Manners, with a sigh, as she closed the door.

Miss Williams made no answer, and they were

just preparing to leave the kitchen, when a little rap came again from the outside.

"Come in," cried the mistress.

It was the old fisherwoman Alsie who entered. "I have come to ask the young lady here a bit favour," she said, looking at Miss Williams.

"Well, Alsie, what is it?" she answered, with a pleasant smile.

"My gran'daughter's dying, ye ken, miss," said the old woman, quite quietly, for death and disease are met among these people with the sternest resignation; "and she wants sorely to see you once more before she goes."

"Is she so ill?" said Miss Williams, commiseratingly. "It is the young girl I met on the links a month or two ago, is it not? She said she was ailing then, but I did not think her so very ill."

"Ay, she's gone fast since then. It's the consumption, ye ken, miss, and this hard weather is just death to them. She wont last many days now I'm thinking."

"What, that pretty girl who used to come round with you, Alsie?" said Mrs. Manners, much concerned. "Why have you not been for something for her before?"

"Why, mistress, ye've so many to help I was just shamed—that's the truth; but the poor lass

took a bit fancy like to the young lady here, and has been talking about her ever since, and begged and prayed hard to-night, as sick folks will, for me to ask her to come and see her—so I just thought I wad take the liberty.”

“It was none, indeed,” said Miss Williams, kindly. “I will be glad to go to see her—I will go with you to-night, Alsie, as if I were alone, I might not be able to find your house.”

“But it’s not fit for the like o’ ye to be out this time o’ night,” said the old woman.

“Oh yes, with you I’ll be quite safe; so, Alsie, if you will wait I will put on my cloak.”

“I’m thinking the young master’s after her,” said Alsie, as Miss Williams left the kitchen. “She’s comely looking, and sweet-spoken enough; but she wad ha’ to be as good as gold to suit the like o’ him.”

“George is a favourite with you then, Alsie?” said Mrs. Manners, with a pleasing smile.

“Ay,” she answered, “he was the flower o’ them when they were bairns; the bravest and comeliest—and he’s grown up the same. No lass need hang her head for shame for Master George.”

“He is a good son to me.”

“Well, Alsie, I’m ready,” said Miss Williams, again entering the kitchen, with a scarlet cloak and hood over her head.

"Wait, my dear, till I've put up a little jelly and tea for the poor lassie," said the kindly mistress.

"And—and, Alsie, would this warm shawl be any use to you, or to her, poor thing?" said Miss Williams, holding up a very handsome Paisley one.

"It's too good," answered Alsie, with covetous eyes; then her humble pious nature getting the better of her momentary cupidity, she added in a different tone, "thank you, miss, but it's too good for the like o' me, and the poor lass will never live to wear it."

"It will do to wrap round her in the house, at any rate," said Miss Williams, gently. "Carry it for me, Alsie, and I will carry the jelly Mrs. Manners has gone for."

It was a bright moonlight night when they went out; a cold, clear, shining night, and Miss Williams, delicate and fragile, coughed as she first met the frosty air.

"Ye shouldn't come out in the cold, miss," said old Alsie.

"I like it," answered Miss Williams, looking yearningly upwards at the cloudless sky—"I like it, Alsie."

"Ye're south-country by your tongue, I take it," said Alsie.

"How did you find that out, Alsie?"

"Lady Manners at the Hall was. I used oftentimes to see her and the childer—a sight o' years ago."

"Theirs was a sad story."

"Ay—one by one; but we must all gan!"

"The poor young heir was young to die."

"That's Walter—ay, his was a sudden call."

"Every one seems to have loved him better than Sir Hugh."

"Mr. George is the best o' them all," said Alsie; "but, hinny, don't let us tramp by the road. Let's gan by the links, and we'll save a vast o' time."

Under Alsie's guidance, therefore, who had known every inch of the ground for seventy years, they began ascending a narrow pathway which led straight across the links to the village; and presently as they did so, on the sands below, two figures standing together became distinctly visible in the moonlight.

"Ye ken wha they are?" said old Alsie, pointing them out.

Miss Williams looked, and in the cold white light recognised the beautiful face of Peggy Richardson and that of Sir Hugh Manners.

He was holding both her hands, and her face, impassioned and tender, was turned towards him; but even as they stood a moment watching them,

she crept closer, and laid her head fondly upon his breast.

"Ay," said old Alsie, shortly, "we'd best gan on. Ye wadna' catch Master George at the like o' that—and Peggy Richardson too, who used to hold her head so high!"

"There may be no harm."

"No, there mayn't; but when a gentleman like Sir Hugh comes out o' nights to meet a poor lass like Peggy, it's hard to say."

Miss Williams made no reply to this, but walked on in silence for the next few minutes by the old woman's side.

By-and-bye they reached the village, and through the narrowest and dirtiest of its dark and narrow alleys or streets, old Alsie guided their footsteps with the familiarity of home.

"It's but a poor place," she said, "but here for more than thirty years I and the goodman lived together."

"Has he been long dead?" asked Miss Williams.

"Nigh sixteen years, hinny; the poor lass ye've come out to see to-night is the daughter of our eldest lad."

"And he?"

"Where his father is," said Alsie, pointing solemnly to the sea. "They both went down together, and ne'er were washed ashore; but the Lord

has them in His keeping; there safe as 'neath the sod."

"And—and you lived on," said Miss Williams, looking at Alsie as if she wondered how she had survived such overwhelming misfortunes.

"There were five fatherless bairns left," said the old woman, almost sternly, "and a poor widow nigh her time. I was not like ye fine ladies, I had no time to wail."

"And you supported them?"

"I had tramped the roads before, and I did it then, and some of the gentry helped us till the last poor bairn was born; then we just lived on together as best we could, till Willie's wife wed again, and the three bit lassies bided on wi' me."

"Have you them all now?"

"No, hinny; the two elder ones are married; and so wad poor Katie ha' been too, but her lad was drowned last fall, when Mitchell's herring-boat went down. It was a luckless day, for she's never been the same lassie any more."

"Poor, poor girl," said Miss Williams; and with a sorrowful heart she entered their humble dwelling.

"Ye've been long in coming, granny," said the fretful voice of an invalid from the bed.

"Ay, Katie; but I've brought you something now."

"What is it?" said the girl, with feverish anxiety.

"The bonny young lady ye wanted sae much to see," said old Alsie, pushing Miss Williams forward.

"I am sorry you are so ill, Katie," she said.

"Ay, miss," answered Katie, shyly.

"You should have sent for me before," said Miss Williams, gently.

"Gran'mother said I hadn't," replied the poor girl quickly. "Gran'mother said," and her thin white face grew scarlet, "that ladies didn't mind to be fashed wi' the like o' us."

"I've found it sae," said old Alsie, sorrowfully.

"I should have been glad to come," said Miss Williams, taking Katie's hot hand, which was nervously clutching at the coverlet, "and I hope I'll often see you now, Katie."

"She hasn't long to bide," said the grandmother.

"Oh, Alsie, don't say that," said Miss Williams.

"But I's glad to go," said the poor girl, turning away her head, and tears rising in her bright and sunken eyes. "I's glad to leave the weary world."

"Do you suffer much?"

"At times—ay."

"She's choked like," said Alsie.

"Well, Katie, we've all bitter troubles to bear, I think," said Miss Williams, with a sigh.

"Mine ha' been very sare," answered the girl, weeping.

"She never looked up again after poor Jimmy's death," said Alsie.

"What—what—did I care for ought after that!"

"You loved him so much, then?" said Miss Williams, commiseratingly.

"Ay!" and she covered her face with her thin hands. "Wha was like him?"

"Don't cry, dear," said Miss Williams, kindly; "perhaps he is far happier now—perhaps he is in heaven."

"But how do I know that?" answered the poor girl, sharply and eagerly. "Folks talk o' meeting him in heaven—how do I know that he is there?"

"But God is very good."

"Ay—gran'mother says sae—she that has lost husband and bairns, all out on yon cruel sea!"

"Hinny, it was His will," replied Alsie, solemnly.

"I—I cannot bow to it; my Jimmy that was sae handsome and sae young; surely He might ha' spared *him*."

"Try a little of the jelly Mrs. Manners sent you, Katie," said Miss Williams, "and do not talk any more just now. She has sent you so many good things."

"She's very kind."

"See, I will lift you up." And Miss Williams put her arms round Katie's shrunken faded form, and gently raised her.

"I'm glad I've seen you," said the poor girl, softly, after a few spoonfuls of jelly. "Will you come to see me again—before I go?"

"Often, I hope, Katie."

"And Mr. George?" she continued, wistfully. "D'ye ken, miss, I think he has a look o' my Jimmy in his handsome face."

"I am sure he will come."

"D'ye mind that day ye spoke to me o' the links? He was sitting at y'r feet. I ken'ed," continued the girl, with a gentle smile, "I ken'ed then he liked ye well."

"Oh no, Katie."

"Ah—but I ken better."

After this Miss Williams sat nearly an hour by the sick girl's bed; and when at length she rose to go, a happier and more peaceful expression was on the dying face.

"I'm sorely impatient at times," she whispered, as Miss Williams bent over her to kiss her as she said good-bye; "but the days are sae long, and I lie here all alone."

"Your grandmother is obliged to be out, you see."

"Ay, poor body. She's seventy-four, and has to tramp every day, wet or dry, nigh a dozen miles."

"It is wonderful that she can."

"The creels are sae heavy," said Katie, wearily ; "e'en when I was well my back was just broke wi' a full one."

"Ye niver war strong, hinny," said the grandmother, returning into the room ; for she had been engaged with some domestic duties outside while Miss Williams was talking to Katie. "Now, my old back the Lord just fits for its burden," and she laughed.

"You've a good heart, Alsie," said Miss Williams.

"Ay, miss, but after yon child's gone I hope my journey will be nigh over. But are ye going? God in heaven bless ye for coming to see the poor bairn. I can see by the look o' her ye have done her good, and now I'll see ye safely hame."

"Nonsense, Alsie, you are too old to come out again to-night. No one will touch me, and I'll run all the way."

"I brought ye out," said Alice, gravely, "and I'll set ye safely back. My legs are old, as ye say, but they'll carry me well enough to the end. It's not right for a young lass like ye to be out o' nights, when some fine gentlemen we ken of are abroad."

"But really I am so sorry——"

"Say nae more about it. Hinny, I'll be back to thee in a quarter of an hour ; keep thy heart easy until then."

They went by the road, and old Alsie tramped on as sturdily as if she had not walked many a weary mile that day before, talking as she went with her usual cheerful resignation.

"It's a long lane which knows no turning," she said. "I think I and the poor lassie have about come to the corner."

When they were nearly half way to the Vicarage, a sudden turn of the road brought them close behind Sir Hugh Manners, who was walking on smoking, and apparently had just left the links and come on the highway on his road to the Hall.

"Let us walk slowly, Alsie," whispered Miss Williams. "That is surely Sir Hugh."

"Ay, it's him. Where has he left the poor lass, I wonder?" said Alsie.

They slackened their pace accordingly ; but as ill-fortune would have it, Sir Hugh stopped to look at his watch in the moonlight, and turned partly round to get a better light, and in doing so caught sight of them, and having recognised Miss Williams, he immediately advanced a few steps forward to meet them.

"What good luck has sent you here?" he said ;

"and where, if it is not an impertinent question, have you and Alsie been?"

"We have been to see Alsie's grandchild, who is very ill," replied Miss Williams.

"Oh, some good work! Well, Alsie, I'll spare your old feet any further walking to-night; I will see Miss Williams safely to the Vicarage."

"I am in charge o' the young lady, sir," answered Alsie, stiffly.

"Wont you trust her with me?" asked Sir Hugh, with a careless laugh. "Tell her, Miss Williams, you can fully depend on me; that you and I are old friends."

"I do not wish to tell an untruth, Sir Hugh," said Miss Williams, coldly.

"Are you so sure it is one?" sneered Sir Hugh.

"Yes."

"Nothing is sure in this world—don't you know that?"

"I really know nothing about it. Good night, Sir Hugh; Alsie is quite able to take care of me, and I will not trouble you to go any further out of your way."

"It is no trouble I assure you, Miss Williams; and I shall have the greatest pleasure in seeing you home."

"Well, we are nearly there now. Alsie, if you

will go to the turn of the road, I will not take you further."

But the old woman went steadily on with them to the very gate of the Vicarage, then she stopped.

"Ye'll be safe now, I think, miss," she said. "Good night, and the Lord watch o'er ye. Good night, Master Hugh. I beg y'r pardon, Sir Hugh; but the name whiles slips on my tongue still."

"Good night, old Alsie," said Sir Hugh, laying his hand on the garden gate, but not opening it.

"Don't go in for a few minutes," he said, addressing Miss Williams, "the night is so fine."

"I would rather go in, Sir Hugh," she answered; "will you kindly open the gate?"

"If you wish it, of course," said Sir Hugh, complying with her request; "but why are you so reserved?"

"I do not know what you mean."

"Well, I will go no further," said Sir Hugh, pausing in the middle of the avenue, "since you are so very bad tempered."

"Good night then, Sir Hugh," said Miss Williams, and she walked on to the entrance alone. But the jealous eyes of Adelaide Manners had seen her part with her companion; for, restless and unhappy, she was leaning against her bedroom window, and in the cold clear moonlight she now recognised her

cousin, returning apparently alone with Miss Williams.

"It is disgraceful!" she muttered to herself with bitter anger, "utterly, utterly disgraceful! George shall know—she shall leave this house, I'm determined. Oh! Hugh, Hugh, how can you," she went on passionately, "how can you disgrace yourself so far!"





CHAPTER XI.

A DREADFUL DISCOVERY.

SIR HUGH came down the next day to the Vicarage, and Adelaide received him with the most chilling reserve.

"What have I done to offend you?" he asked in a few minutes, at once noticing her manner.

"I think you should know best," answered Adelaide; "your—your conduct may be what you consider honourable, Hugh, but no one else does."

"What do you mean?" asked Sir Hugh, his pale face for once growing scarlet as he spoke.

"You—you may think it gentlemanly," went on Adelaide, with increasing agitation, "to walk about at nights with your uncle's governess—when I'm in the house too!"

Her cousin burst into a loud laugh.

"So that's all," he said; "well, my dear Adelaide, don't be jealous. I met Miss Williams and old Alsie a hundred yards from the gate here, and the old woman never left us till we reached it, and

your handsome governess was just about as pleasant to me as you are now."

"Is this true, Hugh?"

"Ask the girl herself—ask the old fisherwoman. They had gone, it seems, on some charitable errand of your stepmother's to the village, and I met them by accident, close to the house, on their way back."

"If—if I could trust you."

"What mountains you women make out of mole-hills," continued Sir Hugh, contemptuously; "but it's true what I tell you; and also that Miss Williams, or whatever you call her, would scarcely speak to me when I did see them."

"I can scarcely believe that."

"True though, on my honour. She is doing the coy I suppose to me, by the way of making love to George."

"Impudent creature!"

"She is wise, my dear, she is wise. George is the most likely victim."

"I cannot bear to hear you talk thus."

"Why?"

"I have told you before; but if I have wronged you about last night forgive me. I saw you part with her from my bedroom window;" and as she spoke she came up towards him and held out her hand.

"It's all right," said Sir Hugh, shaking it, for he rather liked Adelaide; "and now that this folly is settled, to-morrow is New-year's eve, isn't it? Well, I want you, George, and the governess to come up to decorate the bran-new Christmas tree which came down from town this morning, with no end of toys for the children on New-year's day."

"Need we bring Miss Williams?" said Adelaide, with a clouded brow.

"George would never forgive us if we didn't. Come, Adelaide, don't be silly and jealous, child, but look pleasant. When will George be back? I mean by what train?"

"He said he would be here for dinner."

"Well then, come about eight o'clock. There are some jolly things for you all, I can tell you—rings and I don't know what."

"It is very kind of you."

Sir Hugh shrugged his shoulders. "One gets infected in the country with the spirit of kinsmanship," he said; "I want my beloved cousins, big and little, to enjoy themselves for once at my expense."

"We have been ever friends," said Adelaide—"ever more than the rest, haven't we, Hugh?"

"Except when we quarrel," answered Sir Hugh, lightly. "And now, good-bye for the present, Adelaide. I am going over this morning to Lilbourne, to invite the little Lilbournes to come."

“Good-bye,” said Adelaide, and she bit her lips, and sighed as she spoke.

“Does he love me?” she thought. “Will he ever love me? Oh, how happy we could be!”

She stood long there in the chill morning at the window, from which she watched him go—stood thinking of her life with indignation, almost with despair.

“I am weary of it,” she thought, “utterly weary. No one loves me here—I am nothing to them all. Oh! if Hugh would only say he cared for me—only marry me. Yet what is there to prevent him? Surely it cannot be that woman; that woman he has scarcely seen. Yet how do I know this?” she reflected, with a bitter pang. “It may be a plan between them that she is here at all; it may be that which makes him stay. He says he has seen her before. Oh, my God! how do I know where—how do I know how!”

“We are going for a walk, Adelaide,” said Milly, opening the door of the room and putting in her lovely face; “will you come?”

“No, child, no; shut the door. Yet stay, Milly—is your governess going with you?”

“No; she has gone to the village to see old Alsie’s sick granddaughter, and take her some books.”

“Are you sure?”

"I saw her go, Adelaide," said Milly, with wondering eyes.

"Very well—that will do. Thank you, Milly, for asking me to go; but my head aches."

"Oh! I'm so sorry," said the child. "Is there anything I can get to do it good?"

"No, Milly; go for your walk. She is the best of them all," she thought, as her little sister left the room—"more like a real Manners."

In the meanwhile Miss Williams had found her way to old Alsie's cottage, and the face of the poor sick girl who lay there brightened with indescribable joy when she saw her come in.

"I've been praying ye might come," she said; "and now that is answered, maybe if I pray to meet my Jim in heaven God will hear that too."

"We are told that everything is heard, Katie, you know," said Miss Williams.

"Ah! but I've prayed oftentimes, and it wasn't."

"Perhaps you did not ask aright."

"Maybe I didn't," answered the girl, simply. "I seem to see things clearer—when I am going to die."

She was, indeed, going to die. In the daylight, her ghastly pallor, her sunken cheeks, and the extraordinary brightness of her eyes were more visible than by the dim candlelight by which Miss Williams had seen her the night before.

"You are not worse this morning?" asked Miss Williams, kindly.

"No; better—oh! so much better; happier like than I ha' been for months."

"And your grandmother is out?"

"With the creel. She was going the Lilbourne road this morning, poor body; so 'twill be late before she's back."

"I am glad I have come to see you, then," said Miss Williams; "and now I am going to read you a story."

For nearly two hours Miss Williams sat patiently reading by her side, the poor girl listening with the greatest interest; and when she rose to go Katie put out her thin hand—

"You'll mind bring Mr. George," she said.

"Yes; I am sure he will come. He is coming home to-morrow," replied Miss Williams.

"God bless ye both!" said Katie; and with these words of the dying girl ringing in her ears Miss Williams walked slowly home.

She stopped however a moment on her way—stopped to post a letter to Mr. George Manners at Oldcastle. All the world might have seen its contents, yet it made George at first very uneasy when he received it. It contained, nevertheless, but a very simple request; which was, to purchase her some wine for Katie, and bring it out with him when

he came on the following day to Narbrough; and she enclosed a five-pound note for the payment.

"I would rather she wrote to ask me to give her some," groaned poor George, as he crushed the note in his hand; "rather, a thousand times, she hadn't a farthing, than all this wealth and this mystery; yet five pounds isn't much," he thought the next minute. "Poor generous little girl, fancy her thinking about the wine, instead of buying some paltry trinket, as Adelaide would have done."

He came to Narbrough the next day in an earlier train than they expected him, and when he arrived at the Vicarage he found only Adelaide—who was looking very moody and unhappy—at home to receive him, and she certainly did not do so with much cordiality.

She gave him Sir Hugh's message about going up to the Hall in the evening, and when he asked where the others were, she said petulantly—

"How can I tell you where they are? I know nothing about them. They are always down at the village—beautiful place that it is! They say some of the people are starving there, but I never believe such stories."

"Why don't you go and see if it is true?" answered George.

"I? Not I, indeed! I have no taste for horrible sights."

"But you might give them some little help perhaps."

"My dear George, I never was a Dorcas, and I never will be."

"You might be happier perhaps if you were," said George.

"Who says I am not happy?" asked Adelaide, turning scarlet.

"You don't look so."

"How can I be living here," retorted Adelaide ;
"I who have been brought up so differently?"

"Living under your father's roof, with an excellent woman like Mrs. Manners?"

"The cook is an excellent woman, I've no doubt, George, yet I cannot say I cultivate her society."
George sighed.

"Whatever Mrs. Manners's birth was," he said presently, "every one respects her."

"Except me."

"Adelaide, you are too absurd."

"There, we are beginning to quarrel again, George. *Could* you be five minutes in the house without finding fault with me, do you think?"

"I hope so," he answered, with a smile ; "but I'll put myself out of the way of temptation. I am going to look for the others ;" and taking up his hat, he left the house some ten minutes after he had entered it.

"My only brother!" said Adelaide, bitterly, after he was gone.

George took the road to the village and walked briskly forward. It was a fine clear frosty day, and his spirits rose after the brief annoyance which Adelaide's manner had caused him passed away. "She is dissatisfied and unhappy," he thought; "poor girl! I should pity her instead of being angry."

He reached the village without seeing anything of his sisters or their governess; and then leaving the road, he crossed the links and went down upon the sands; and his dark face suddenly grew a most uncomfortable scarlet as he did so, for walking close to the sea, where the sand was the firmest, were Miss Williams and Sir Hugh Manners.

For a moment he thought they were alone, but the next Dolly ran up to Sir Hugh, and apparently asked for a ride on his horse, which he was leading with his arm through the bridle, for Sir Hugh lifted her up upon the saddle.

Still George felt anything but pleased, for there was something familiar in the whole group, and he bit his lips, and stroked his moustache, with some very disagreeable feelings disturbing his heart.

Suddenly there was a shout, and the other three children, who had been sitting under a bank and now saw him, ran forward towards him, and a

general kissing ensued ; but George, jealous and unhappy, kept watching the three figures in front.

"Have you been long on the sands?" he asked of the children.

"Oh ! ever so long," said Katie. "Hugh has been riding and walking about with us till we are all nearly tired."

"We better go home then," said George, angrily.

"Wait till the others turn and see us," said Katie ; "or shall we run on and tell them you've come?"

"Better leave them alone—they can take care of themselves. Come, Bonny, I'll carry you right up the bank."

"But Georgie, what is the matter?" asked Katie, "they really never have seen us."

"I daresay not—now Bonny, jump up."

But just as she did so, Miss Williams turned to look after them, and saw in a moment who had arrived.

"There is your cousin," she said, and she blushed deeply as she spoke.

"I see," said Sir Hugh, who was looking at her with his cold steady gaze. "You are right to blush, Miss Williams, it is really very becoming."

"How can you be so truly absurd?"

Sir Hugh laughed ; but his vanity also was wounded. He had tried to please Miss Williams, and he scarcely cared to confess that he knew he had failed.

"Shall we go to meet him?" he said; but George, carrying Bonny on his shoulder, was already mounting the bank.

"As you please," answered Miss Williams, who felt justly offended at George's behaviour.

"Let us take another turn then," said Sir Hugh, who perfectly understood why George had left, and was rather amused at his conduct.

So Miss Williams and Sir Hugh went again along the sands; Miss Williams feeling more angry than she cared to acknowledge, and vexed with herself for her violent emotion.

Sir Hugh was in one of his sarcastic moods, and finding he only got very brief answers and little encouragement from the handsome governess, he began teasing Dolly, who, however, was in rather too precarious a situation really to quarrel with him, as he was still holding her on the saddle; so getting tired of the trouble, he suddenly pretended to have forgotten an engagement.

"You see what an enchantress you are, Miss Williams," he said, after his imaginary explanation.

"What do you mean?" she answered; for she was annoyed at his manner, and yet more annoyed at his cousin.

"Have you not heard?—I mean I am in simple despair at having to leave you," replied Sir Hugh, with a sneer.

"Good morning," said Miss Williams, haughtily, stopping short. "Come, Dolly;" and Sir Hugh having lifted his cousin off his horse, muttered between his teeth, as he remounted it, "The proud little fool—I'll humble her yet!"

When Miss Williams and Dolly arrived at the Vicarage they heard George's voice in the garden, and when he saw them advancing he came forward to open the gate to admit them.

"Well, you've lost your cavalier," he said, roughly enough.

Miss Williams made him no answer, and George, perhaps a little ashamed of his rudeness, walked on by her side.

"By-the-by," he said, presently, "I received your letter this morning, and I may as well return you your money."

"What, did you not get it?" asked Miss Williams.

"I got six bottles, which will be more than you want, I should think; I brought it to the station with me, and will send James for it now. But six bottles of port wine, Miss Williams, don't generally cost five pounds."

"Oh, I did not know how much you would get, and I thought wine was expensive," she answered, carelessly.

George bit his lips as she spoke.

"Here is your change," he said, and without counting it she put it in her purse.

"You have not cheated yourself I hope," she said, with a smile.

"You'll find the bill and the change all correct I expect," answered George, stiffly.

"I hope it will do her some good—poor little girl!" said the governess.

"How long has she been ill?" asked George, beginning to mollify.

"Since—since her lover was lost in the autumn."

"Poor girl!"

"It is really an affecting sight to see her. I wish you would go."

"What good could I do her?"

"She has taken some foolish notion into her head that you are like the—the poor lad, as they call him here, who was drowned."

"Did she tell you this?" said George.

"Yes, the old grandmother knows you all well, you know; she used to go to the Hall in Lady Manners's time."

"What, Old Alsie! You don't mean to say she is alive still?"

"Yes, poor woman, still," and Miss Williams sighed.

"You speak as if long life was not exactly a treat, Miss Williams," said George, looking at her.

"I don't think it is."

"Nor I, by Jove!" answered Mr. Manners, energetically.

"Not for women at any rate," went on Miss Williams.

"It's women who make all the mischief, I think."

"Because you never understand us."

"It would be a wise man who could—a wiser man than I am."

"I think I might also say the same thing about you. What is the matter with you, Mr. Manners, to-day?"

George was silent.

"I am sorry I gave you the trouble about the wine, if it is that."

"There! That's just like you women! What trouble was it to me? What trouble could it be? I—I who would give my heart's blood to save you a pang—more fool that I am for my pains."

"How have I vexed you then?"

George looked round at her. "When we parted——" he said, and then he hesitated.

"We parted friends, did we not?" asked Miss Williams.

"I expected so," answered George, briefly.

"Then why don't we meet as such? Oh! Mr. Manners, life is too short and too sad, isn't it? for

useless quarrelling. Suppose you tell me at once what I have done."

"We are going to-night to the Hall, are we not?" said George, after a moment's pause; "I will tell you perhaps as we walk home."

"Very well; and in the meantime?"

"I'll try to forget it," said George, with a smile, opening the hall door for Miss Williams, and bowing as she passed him to enter.

"My dear Georgie," said Mrs. Manners, coming out of the dining-room, and throwing her arms round her stepson's neck, "fancy us not being at home when you came!"

"So much for coming before I was expected, mother; but I knew I would be welcome—to you, at any rate."

"Welcome? I should think so. I often tell the little ones the sun seems brighter when you are at home."

"You hear, Miss Williams," said George, laughing and colouring. "My mother is a paragon among women—she is always the same."

"And aren't others, dear?" asked Mrs. Manners, looking from one to the other.

"No, mother, others are not," said George, smiling; "others are—what shall I say, Miss Williams?"

"You must settle it yourself," answered Miss Williams, also with a smile, and then she left them.

To please her boy, Mrs. Manners sent up a message to invite her down to the late dinner. She did this, it must be confessed, with some inward fears of Adelaide's anger ; but when a message was delivered to her by the housemaid, "Miss Williams's love, and she would prefer early tea in the school-room," Miss Manners, who was sitting sulkily by the fire, scarcely raised her head.

It was one of her dark days—one of the days when all the world looked black ; and so she was in despair about Sir Hugh, in despair about her prospects, in despair about everything.

"What's the matter, Adelaide?" said George, kindly ; for he felt sorry for her as she sat there with her gloomy face—but she gave him no answer, and scarcely spoke during the whole time they were at dinner, and when George asked her if she would drive or walk to the Hall, she said, impatiently—

"You'd better ask the governess, as both you and Hugh seem to think her a much more important person than I am."

"How can you be so absurd, Adelaide!" answered George, with a frown.

"Well, he was walking with her last night ; walking with her to-day, the children tell me, for hours. What am I to conclude?"

"That's not true, Adelaide," said Mrs. Manners, eagerly ; "Sir Hugh wasn't walking with Miss

Williams last night. I saw her myself set off with old Alsie, like a good-hearted creature that she is, to see a poor lassie who's ill in the village."

"But did you see her come back?" asked Miss Manners, with a sneer.

"She was back in an hour."

"In an hour or two hours, I do not care which; but Hugh Manners came back with her to the gate."

"Well, if he did, perhaps he had met her, and was sure to see her safe home if he had. Oh! Adelaide, why do you always put things as if they were wrong?"

"In our class," said Adelaide, contemptuously, "we consider a young lady—if you call her one—walking about with a gentleman at night alone decidedly wrong—and as for a governess! But I tell you what it is," she continued, passionately, "I, for one, wont countenance such things. I wont go to the Hall with her to-night."

"Stay at home, then," said George, in a towering passion; "stay at home, you rude, jealous, foolish girl."

"Oh! George," said Mrs. Manners, going up and laying her hand on her son's shoulder—"Oh! dear, consider a moment. Adelaide is vexed; she fancies Sir Hugh runs after Miss Williams—but I wish I did, for I'd think her far safer, poor dear, than the one he really is after."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Adelaide, fiercely.

"He isn't a good man, Adelaide," answered Mrs. Manners. "There's a poor fisher lass——"

"Bah!" interrupted Adelaide, "don't tell me all the vulgar gossip of the kitchen. What do I care what Hugh does with people of *her class*. But it is a different thing when a man walks openly with a person, and invites one to meet her, forsooth!"

"You mean Peggy Richardson, mother?" said George, in a low tone, but with a look of involuntary relief stealing over the expression of his face.

"Yes—poor, poor girl," answered Mrs. Manners, pitifully.

"Poor indeed to trust in him," said George, almost in a whisper; and then, crossing the room, he went up to his sister.

"Adelaide," he said, "you and I are the only children of a dead mother, so do not let any foolish nonsense part us," and he held out his hand. "You know what Hugh is," he went on, "as far as women are concerned; take care how you allow your feelings to be entangled by a man who has, as regards them, no code of honour."

"I—I do not know what you mean," answered Adelaide, blushing scarlet.

"I mean this," said George; "Hugh and you have been much together; do not forget, in your

old relationship and friendship, that he considers women but the idle toys of an hour."

"He could not think that of me," answered Adelaide, proudly.

"I hope not; but let us drop the subject, and I hope you will not act so foolishly again."

"Which means I have to change my mind and go to-night, I suppose," said Adelaide, with a sort of smile. "Well, George—to please you I will."

"Thank you, that is a good girl; and of one thing you may be sure, Adelaide—if—if I thought any one I cared for—but I have said enough; and now what time will you go?"

"I'll run upstairs and tell Miss Williams to get ready, dears," said Mrs. Manners. "Come, Adelaide, it's new Year's Eve, so give your poor step-mother a kiss."

"You are a good woman, mother," said George, looking at her after Adelaide had complied, not ungraciously, with her request. "Where will all the fine people in the world be, I wonder, at the end—when they come to stand by such as you?"

"Oh! Georgie, don't talk nonsense!" said Mrs. Manners, blushing. "You see, Adelaide, he *knows* how to flatter his old mother; but now I must go and look after Miss Williams."

Mrs. Manners found her governess very quietly sitting in the schoolroom, writing some household

orders for herself, which she had asked her to have ready for James in the morning.

"Oh, my dear!" she said, addressing her, "I see you are not dressed."

"No," answered Miss Williams, smiling and rising, "I thought as I was not coming downstairs this evening that I would do very well."

"But are you not going with George and Adelaide to the Hall?"

"I would really rather not."

"But I thought it was all fixed, dear, about you going?"

"Sir Hugh said something about it—but as neither Miss Manners nor Mr. Manners mentioned it—oh yes! I believe he did though."

"George quite expects you are going, and will be so disappointed if you don't."

"I thought perhaps you would let Katie go instead, to help them. I am sure Miss Manners would like it better," she added.

"No, dear, go—I wish you to go; but you won't be offended, will you, if I mention one thing?"

"No, indeed."

"Well, then, don't talk much to Sir Hugh; he's not a good man—and—and, well somebody does not like it."

Miss Williams blushed deeply, as Mrs. Manners spoke.

"You see it is better I should not go at all," she said.

"No, no, but just be a little careful. But come, you must be quick, and make yourself smart. What dress are you going to wear? I have heard George say he likes that blue one best."

"Well, I can wear that."

"Yes, do ; and now I must go and have my last kiss in the nursery."

In about a quarter of an hour Miss Williams came down dressed, and found George Manners sitting reading by the dining-room fire waiting for them.

"Well," he said, rising as she entered, "and so you are ready?"

"Yes ; but I did not wish to go."

"So my mother told me ; but what freak was that?"

"I thought you could do without me."

"It was very foolish of you to think so, then," said George. "But are you warmly wrapped up? We are going to drive there, you know, and walk back."

"Very well."

Adelaide now came into the room, looking handsome, dressed in black velvet with crimson ribbons.

"Are you ready?" she said to her brother ; "the

waggonette is at the door. Are you going to drive, George?"

"Yes."

"But we better take James, too, hadn't we?" went on Miss Manners. "He can sit with Miss Williams behind."

"He can walk," said George, curtly, "if you wish him to go; but I see no reason for it;" and Miss Manners said no more on the subject.

Miss Williams had never been at the Hall since the day when George had gone with them some months ago, but it did not look so mournful now. The entrance was lighted, and when they were ushered into the library Sir Hugh came forward with great cordiality to receive them.

"Well, welcome to the old place again, Adelaide," he said. "Put off your hats, young ladies, and then we will have some tea. You must give it to us, Adelaide, like you used to do."

"Poor aunt!" said Adelaide, with a sigh, looking round the room she knew so well.

"Ay," answered Sir Hugh, "everything is changed."

"Not everything," said Adelaide, softly. "There is still one of the old name left, Hugh."

"I hope he wont disgrace it, then," answered Sir Hugh. "But, ladies, ladies, this will never do — getting into the dismals, etcetera."

Cheer up, for to-morrow we die, is my principle."

"We may, indeed," said George, gravely. He too had been looking round the room, and recalling those who now came to it no more.

"Look at George!" cried Sir Hugh—"there is an unpaid undertaker for you! Dear George, allow me to offer you the brandy bottle."

"I don't need it, Hugh. I was thinking of poor Walter."

"Poor fellow," said Sir Hugh, with momentary gloom; but the next he turned the conversation. "The Christmas-tree has come," he said, "the dearest in London, confound them; and I declare I could lay my hand on a dozen better in the young plantations."

"It's the name of the thing, I suppose," said George.

"Ay, there's a great deal in a name, in spite of the poet; don't you think so, Miss Williams?" went on Sir Hugh. "I hope you are satisfied with yours?"

"Yes, very well," she answered, colouring.

"What is it again?—I forget," said Sir Hugh. "Amy or Ann? I always associate the latter name with sister Ann, who looked out of the window in time at the famous castle of Bluebeard—not that I do not think that my Lord Bluebeard had right on his side."

"How do you make out that, Sir Hugh?"

"What right had she to go peeping and prying, and finding out things she ought not? My dear Adelaide, if ever you should be married, beware of her fate."

"Really, Hugh!"

"Don't look into things too narrowly; don't be poking out all the skeletons we hide in our closets. Depend on't, a little matrimonial blindness on both sides is highly conducive to domestic felicity."

"I hope I shall have nothing to hide, Hugh," said Adelaide.

"But your lord, my dear—don't hope it of him, as I'm sure you've no taste for a fool."

"Mr. Manners, why don't you contradict such heresy?" said Miss Williams.

"I never argue on Hugh's theories—they are too wild for me to follow."

"Yes, he's the good boy, Miss Williams; you could make him believe, I daresay, anything you like."

"It would only be truth, then," retorted Miss Williams.

"Would it? Wonderful for a woman!"

"We had better see about the tree, I think," said Miss Williams.

"To be sure; it's in the dining-room. So you were once in this rats' den before, Miss Williams?"

"Yes."

"Old Bob at the lodge told me. He said a bonny blue-eyed lass, Mr. George seemed uncommon sweet on, was here. You see I could not mistake the description."

"I am glad, at all events, you did not give it before your cousin;" for George had walked on.

"He would only have been pleased. There he is, looking round. What an Othello he looks!"

Miss Williams made no answer. She was annoyed at the whole tone of Sir Hugh's manner, and she went and stood beside George; and when they commenced decorating the tree, she carefully avoided saying anything to their host which she could help.

He had spared no expense in his orders, and there were some really beautiful ornaments among the dolls and toys for the children which had come down.

"That is for a certain Miss Manners," he said, opening a case, and taking out a very handsome gold bracelet and hanging it on one of the branches.

"Oh! Hugh, how generous!" said Adelaide; "what a beautiful thing! May I take it down and examine it? I shall always keep it in memory, Hugh, of your Christmas-tree of 1871."

"The last and the first. There's no need of dates, Adelaide; I'm not likely to do such a stupid thing again."

"Oh! don't say that."

"But I do. And now, Miss Williams, here is a small token of—what shall I say?—of my regard for you," and he held out a pair of valuable gold earrings to the governess; but she drew back.

"No," she said, "you must excuse me."

"Nonsense, nonsense—what, not off a Christmas-tree? Of course you will take them," and he hung them up, each ornament having a little ticket with the intended owner's name attached.

"There is your name, you see," went on Sir Hugh; "I wrote a few names this morning for the gold things which are worth having."

"You must take off that ticket, Sir Hugh," said Miss Williams.

"What, really? Well, somebody else will get them then, as they say. What will you have then?"

"I don't care for anything, thank you."

"Oh, it's out of a sense of propriety, is it? Oh, well, well, I'll say no more."

George Manners had stood by during this conversation, and his face flushed deeply as his cousin spoke.

"You forget, Hugh," he said, brusquely, "that you are a stranger to Miss Williams. You cannot expect her to accept your gifts as if you had known her all your life, like Adelaide."

"I had no wish to offend Miss Williams, I am

sure—she knows that,” answered Sir Hugh, politely; but there was a look in his cold blue eyes as he spoke which made George’s blood boil in his veins.

“This is for that lovely Milly,” he said, the next minute, picking out a locket with a cross of pearls; “for the belle of the Manners—long life and prosperity to her.”

“Poor Milly,” said Adelaide.

“Why poor Milly, Adelaide?” asked Sir Hugh.

“She won’t live, I think,” said Adelaide; “she is very delicate.”

“Don’t say that,” said George, and then he turned away, and began walking restlessly up and down the long dining-room.

“George is very fond of Milly,” said Adelaide, looking after him.

But George was not thinking of Milly. He was weary of this uncertainty, and the old feeling of jealousy was beginning once more to take possession of his heart; yet nothing could be colder than Miss Williams’s manner to Sir Hugh.

“How long will you be about all this rubbish?” he asked in a few minutes, coming up to them—the two ladies being now both mounted on chairs, busily engaged in fastening the various adornments on the tree.

“We will be finished in half an hour. Don’t

you think so, Miss Manners?" replied Miss Williams, looking down at him with a smile.

"I'll go and have a pipe, then," said George, "and come back for you when I think you will be done. You are coming to sit out the old year with us, aren't you, Hugh?"

"All right, old fellow;" and so George went, and wandered up and down outside his old home.

"I was a boy then, I am a man now," he thought; "but how changed I am—how utterly changed: if one could but only know how it would end—how it would end," and he gave an impatient sigh.

He finished his pipe in about half an hour, and then went back into the Hall, and found there his cousin, Miss Williams, and Adelaide, all preparing to start.

"What, are you ready?" he said. "I did not think you would have been done so soon."

"Yes," answered Adelaide, who was dressed in her hood and shawl, "we are ready;" and she went to the Hall door and stood waiting for them there, while Sir Hugh was fastening on his old military cloak.

"It does for a cold night still," he said, and then went to a hat-stand, and from among a dozen other coverings chose a regimental cap.

"You remember the old regiment, don't you?"

said he, coming up to Miss Williams, and pointing out the gold numbers on the band.

"I—I——" and she turned deadly pale in a moment; gasping and trembling, as if struck by some sudden blow.

"I thought you would," he continued, significantly; "I am coming, Adelaide. George, you will look after Miss Williams;" and Sir Hugh turned, and went on to his cousin.





CHAPTER XII.

"I CANNOT TELL YOU."

COME out—are you going to faint?" said George Manners, in a cold, strange voice, the next minute; and Miss Williams put out her hand piteously, almost like a blind person feeling in the dark, as he spoke.

"What is the matter? Cannot you walk?" went on George. "Don't look like that, for God's sake! Here, take hold of my arm, and I will drag you into the air."

"Have—have some pity on me," she said, trembling and shivering, as the night air struck her.

"Lean against me one moment—and I will wrap you in this," answered George Manners, stopping and taking off his overcoat, and folding it round her shoulders.

"Thank you," said the trembling woman.

"Don't thank me," said George, sternly; "but let me try to get you home;" and clinging to him, helpless and feeble, as if about to die, Miss

Williams tottered on some moments in silence by his side.

Then suddenly she stopped.

"Don't judge me, George—don't judge me harshly," she cried; "I am not to blame."

"I am not judging you. Don't excite yourself any more," he answered, gloomily.

"But it must seem so strange to you," she continued, partly recovering herself, "that Sir Hugh should say what he did just now. But will you trust me, George? I have done no wrong. I should be so sorry for you to think that I had done wrong."

"What is there between you and this man, then?" said George, savagely, turning and facing her. "What mystery is there between you and Hugh Manners?"

"None, none, I swear!" replied Miss Williams. "He is nothing to me—I detest and despise him."

"He is a scoundrel," said George, between his set teeth; "a scoundrel, whatever it is, to strike a woman as he did you to-night. But can you not trust me? Will you not give me a right to tell him what I think?"

"I cannot tell you," said she, sobbing and clinging to his arm. "I dare not tell you; but, oh! George, trust me a little still."

"Don't say that—don't call me that!"

"But why? For a few words will you quite put me away?"

"For such words as those—yes!"

"I thought you cared for me a little more than that," she sobbed.

"Shall I tell you how much?" said George, his voice broken with uncontrollable pain. "Shall I tell you that I meant to ask you to-night to be my wife?—that I would have toiled for you—and tried to make our poor home happy?—O my God!" and he pushed her roughly away. "Why have I ever seen you?—why have you made me so utterly miserable as I feel now?"

"Forgive me, George, forgive me," said she, coming back and laying her hand upon his arm; "God knows I meant you no wrong."

"Why did you do it then?" he answered, turning away his head. "Why have you destroyed my peace?"

"Dear George, I pray that I have not."

"You have then," said he, bitterly. "Are you satisfied? All my life's hopes were set on you."

"Oh, George!"

"I have loved you too well," he continued, with his voice quivering with emotion; "and to find out now—that you are——"

"But what do you know?"

"That you are worthless!" cried George, passionately. "Has a good girl, do you think, secrets with a man like Hugh Manners?—secrets that can drive the blood from her face, and send her out trembling with shame like you?"

"You are cruel—too cruel."

"I am—God forgive me; I would not strike you, Amy, as he did; I would help you even now in any way that I could—but that is all."

"I ask no more, Mr. Manners," she replied with some pride. "You have judged me—you can tell your mother and I will go."

"Don't let me send you out homeless into the world," said George, "you can stay for me."

"With such suspicions—no."

"Clear yourself from them, then," said he, eagerly. "Oh, Amy! sometimes I have thought—it may have been vain of me—that you cared for me a little; for the sake at least of my love for you, tell me the truth. Are you," and he ground his teeth together, "are you and Hugh Manners lovers now?"

"No, I swear it solemnly."

"Can I trust you even in that?" answered George, with a piteous break in his strong voice; "you—that I had hoped to—to——" and he turned away his head, utterly overcome.

"You can trust me," said Amy Williams,

solemnly. "George, it is wrong of me to say it—but I only care for you too much. I am not deceiving you."

"Thank God for that then," he said in a low tone, holding out his hand. "I will believe your word."

"He has taken a cruel advantage of—something very painful—that is all."

"He knows something of your early history, I suppose?"

Miss Williams was silent.

"Amy, why cannot you tell me?" said George, impatiently.

"I cannot—I dare not. But will you believe this?—whatever cruel imputations he may cast on me, I have not deserved them—not willingly at least."

"Here is the gate," said George, with a deep sigh, for they had now reached the Vicarage. "I do not understand you—will you say to them I am not coming in just now?"

"Oh! don't go out alone," she answered, taking his hand; "don't, George. Do you think I am not suffering too? Oh, George! come in—it is New Year's eve—come in, and forget what you have heard."

"I will never do that—no man could."

"My life has been very cruel," answered Miss Williams, covering her face with her hand; "would to God that it were done."

"Do not let anything I have said grieve you more," replied George; "and if I can do anything for you will you come to me still?"

"Yes," and she held out her hand to him once more—"yes; but for my sake to-night come in, and make no difference with Sir Hugh; just consider what your mother and sister would think."

"Always thinking of appearances," said George, bitterly. "A woman breaks her heart and yours, and goes down smiling to the company afterwards. Thank you, Miss Williams, I cannot to-night shake Hugh Manners's false hand."

"Oh, George!——" but he had already turned, going out into the moonlight to suffer his misery alone.

"Where is George?" asked Mrs. Manners, as soon as Miss Williams reached the Vicarage door; for she was standing there waiting for them.

"He—he is not very well—at least—he is well, but he's not coming in just now," stammered Miss Williams in reply; and Mrs. Manners, seeing her pale and tear-stained face by the lamp in the hall, looked at her in the utmost surprise.

"What is it?" she said. "Have you quarrelled?"

"I—I don't know—Oh, Mrs. Manners! I am not well; let me go to my room. Do not say anything about me to the others."

"I will get you some wine," replied the kindly

creature at once. "Sit down, my dear; why, you are all in a tremble."

"I—I am very unhappy," sobbed the poor girl, leaning her head against Mrs. Manners's broad shoulder.

"Never mind, dear, never mind; you'll get it all made up again. George is a bit hot-tempered, I know—indeed, all the Manners are. I am sure his father is, but it's soon off. You'll see it will all come right;" for Mrs. Manners could conceive nothing but a lovers' quarrel to be the matter.

"Don't say anything about this, please," whispered Miss Williams; "I can walk now, and will go upstairs. Just say, dear Mrs. Manners, I am not very well."

"But about George, he'll surely come in?"

"I do not think he will just yet."

"He came with you to the gate?"

"Yes."

"Oh, then he's sure to come in. You see I have some supper ready for you all."

"He said you had not to wait."

"I'll send out Jim to seek him," said Mrs. Manners; and Miss Williams, who thought this might be the best plan perhaps, made no demur.

Meanwhile Sir Hugh and Miss Manners were standing by the drawing-room fire.

"What can have become of the others?" said Adelaide, uneasily.

"Getting sentimental in the moonlight," answered Sir Hugh. "You see it's only old staggers like you and me, Adelaide, who never indulge in such things."

"Yes," said Adelaide, and she bit her lips as she spoke.

"Do you think George cares anything about her?" she asked in a few minutes.

"Yes."

"Oh, Hugh! do you really?"

"To be sure I do."

"What a thing it will be if he marries a woman like that."

"Yes; but he wont. There they are."

"I don't hear George's voice," said Adelaide.

"He'll be coming presently. Why, Adelaide, isn't there some one crying in the hall?"

"I don't know. No, I think not; but I'll go and see;" but as she opened the drawing-room door, Miss Williams fled upstairs.

"Is there anything the matter?" she asked of Mrs. Manners, who was still standing in the hall.

"No, only George has not come in—has gone for a walk. He's got a headache. I'll send Jim to seek him," answered Mrs. Manners, in the greatest confusion.

"The lovers must have quarrelled," said Adelaide, scornfully, returning to the drawing-room, "and George has gone off in a pet."

"I better go too, then," said Sir Hugh, yawning. "He will be coming in, I suppose, like a raging lion."

"Oh, Hugh! don't go. Sit out the old year. Supper will be ready soon."

"My dear girl, George will be making a scene; I had better go."

"Have you vexed him about anything?"

"Why, you were there the whole time."

"I heard nothing. But stay, Hugh, spend the last hours of the old year among friends."

"By Jove, one's best would be the blankets this cold night, I think," replied Sir Hugh, shrugging his shoulders. "Good night, Adelaide. Make my excuses to your stepmother, and mind come in your best looks to-morrow;" and then, after shaking her hand, he went away.

"Where is your cousin gone?" said Mrs. Manners, coming into the room a few minutes later.

"To bed, like all wise people," replied Adelaide. "Good night, Mrs. Manners; I will wish you a happy New Year to-morrow morning."

"I will wait up for your brother," said Mrs. Manners, gravely. "Good night, Adelaide."

The New Year had begun when George Manners, with a white, stern set face, re-entered the Vicarage.

"Well, Georgie," said his stepmother, opening the door when she heard his step outside, "come in. Come by the fire; I've a famous one for you here, and the kettle is boiling."

George came in without speaking, and stood holding his hands over the blazing fire.

"Why, you are shivering, my dear. Let me pull off your boots; and sit down here," and she drew the Vicar's own easy-chair close to the fender. "And now, Georgie, let me mix you some whisky."

"You are very good, mother."

"I'm glad to see you back, the night is so cold."

"Is Hugh Manners gone?" said George.

"Yes; he only stayed a few minutes, and Adelaide would not sit up to supper after he was gone; so your father, poor man, got all the good things to himself; but he really seemed to enjoy them."

"And—and Miss Williams?" asked George.

"She came in, in such a state, poor thing—crying fit to break her heart. Oh, Georgie! you shouldn't vex her, for I'm sure she loves you well."

"No, mother, no."

"But I know better, Georgie; and trust a woman for finding out these things."

"It would be better if she did not. No, mother, you must forget all about this—Amy Williams cannot be my wife."

"What! have you quarrelled as bad as that?"

"It is all over," answered George; and he turned away his head, ashamed of his irrepressible emotion, even before his fond stepmother.

"Oh! my dear," said she, coming and laying her arm round his shoulder, "don't let a little thing part you. You love each other, and many waters cannot quench it."

George only bowed his head down upon her kind hand.

"What is it, dear?" urged Mrs. Manners. "Cannot I put it right? If it is anything about that cold-hearted villain, Sir Hugh, I don't believe it. It's poor Peggy Richardson, I fear, that——"

"Ay—she's the last, I daresay," answered George, with great bitterness.

"But, Georgie, there's nothing between Miss Williams and Sir Hugh; he's scarcely seen her."

"Mother," said George, rising, "do not let us mention her any more—do not talk of her, please. But you will be kind to her still—after I am gone."

"After you are gone!"

"Yes; I am obliged to start for London to-morrow, but I may not be long away."

"Oh, George! what is it? What is the matter?"

"I would rather say nothing. Bear with me to-night, mother; it's the last time you will see me thus."

"What can I say to comfort you, dear?"

"Nothing," he answered, with a kind of smile—
—"nothing, mother. But I have not wished you a happy new year yet;" and he went up to her, and kissed her cheek.

"God give you one, my darling," said Mrs. Manners, the tears streaming down her comely cheeks as she spoke.

George smiled again. "Good night, and God bless you, mother," he said; and then, almost without another word, he left her and went upstairs to endure his sleepless pain.





VIII.

ONE.

Down to breakfast the
George Manners went
Manners, who felt uneasy
he heard him stirring at a
morning, she rose quietly to
and welfare.

he said, in surprise, when
dining-room, where she already
fire burning to receive him,
to say you are up at this time

know what train you were going by,
answered; "and so I got up to see
breakfast. But, Georgie, I hope you
your mind about leaving at all."

by the seven train to Oldcastle,
South."

ers looked at him as he spoke, and in
ce read all he had suffered.

ge will do you good," she said, with-

out further comment ; " but be sure you take care of yourself, my dear, when you are away."

" Oh yes."

The waggonette came round in a few minutes to take him to the station—for George had given his orders the night before—and in a quarter of an hour he was gone, leaving Mrs. Manners anxious and distressed on his account, but still hopeful that the cloud which had come between her son and the woman she so plainly saw he loved might pass away.

When the Vicar and Adelaide appeared they naturally felt the greatest astonishment on hearing that he had left ; and Adelaide's lip curled when Mrs. Manners began explaining, in a very hesitating and unconnected manner, that business, " important business," had suddenly called him away.

" Of course," said she, sarcastically, " papa and I perfectly believe that, when no letter or messenger of any kind has arrived, and when he came yesterday he fully intended staying a day or two, and was going to Hugh's to-night. Papa, I believe our family has received a great honour. I believe your lovely governess has refused your son."

" Don't talk nonsense, Adelaide," said the Vicar, sharply.

" You will see. Poor George ! it is a proper reward for his folly. I wonder where this enchan-

tress is. Does she usually come down to breakfast at ten?"

"She cannot be well, I am afraid," said Mrs. Manners, and rang for one of the maids to take some breakfast up to Miss Williams, and to inquire how she was.

The answer came—"Miss Williams was very poorly, and was not able to get up;" so after breakfast was over Mrs. Manners went upstairs to see after her.

She found her lying with a white, worn face, complaining of a dreadful headache, and looking really exceedingly ill.

"My dear," said she, kindly, "I am sorry to see you like this."

"Oh, I'll be better presently, Mrs. Manners; if my headache were only gone I would not feel quite so stupid."

"George is gone," said Mrs. Manners, looking at her steadily; and a burning blush spread over her face down to her very throat, the moment after Mrs. Manners had spoken.

"Gone?" said she, in a very faint low voice.

"Yes, to London; I don't know when he may be back."

Miss Williams made no answer; she only sighed heavily, and moved uneasily in the bed.

"Perhaps you will be better alone, dear," said

Mrs. Manners, considerably. "Try to get a little sleep."

But none came to her aid ; and Mrs. Manners had no sooner closed the door than tears, bitter streaming tears, began pouring down her face ; and turning her head upon the pillow, she strove to suffocate the sobs which rose with overwhelming force.

He was gone then without a word ; and she thought that he loved her—had pitied him because he loved her so well. "Oh, George ! I would have trusted you," she said, half aloud. "I would not have cast you off for a few false words."

She was too restless and unhappy to lie still, and came down to luncheon about one o'clock, shivering and looking so ill, that even Adelaide Manners felt half sorry for her ; but wished at the same time that her cousin Hugh could see her as she was now.

"What can they admire about her?" thought Adelaide, glancing again and again at the worn and weary face before her. "But I trust, at any rate, George's folly is ended now."

"You will be able to go to the Hall I hope to-night, Miss Williams?" said Mrs. Manners in her kind way, after vainly pressing her governess to eat ; but Miss Williams shook her head.

"No, Mrs. Manners," she said, "I have luckily

nothing to do, and therefore Sir Hugh will never miss me."

"Oh, but I'm sure he will. You must try to go. If you were to lie down for a little now, you would get up quite fresh by five."

But Miss Williams was firm.

"I could not—I really could not," she said; and as tears rose in her eyes as she spoke, Mrs. Manners thought it best to let her have her own way.

All the children were to go, even Bonny. Yet the child was not well. She had a cold, Mrs. Manners said, and proposed that she should stay at home to keep Miss Williams company. But spoilt little Bonny burst into tears at the very mention of such a thing.

"She would go and see Hugh's tree," she said, "and Willy should go too;" so Mrs. Manners, who never had strength of mind to refuse her darling anything, gave way, and the "little one" went with the rest.

Dinner had to be at six o'clock at the Hall, and the children's party afterwards; and when they were all gone, Miss Williams felt utterly lonely and unhappy. She went out into the bleak garden for a few minutes, and wandered up and down the damp dark walks. She thought of going to see the poor sick girl at the village, but the overpowering selfishness of her sorrow was too great.

“How can I talk to her of resignation and hope,” she thought, “when I have none? How can I comfort her, who am so miserable and wretched myself?”

Weary in a short time of the dreary garden, she returned to the house. A cheerful fire was burning in the dining-room, but she took a candle and went up to the unlighted drawing-room, and found among some others lying on the table Mrs. Manners's photograph book.

She knew who she would find there: George, in velvet jacket and falling collar, with rosy cheeks and smooth brown hair—George at ten; then a handsome lad in college cap and gown, with a bright, careless, smiling face. Then George as he was now—grave, thoughtful, but handsome still. “How handsome!” thought the pale-faced governess, and stooped down and kissed the broad, square brow, the original of which was aching that moment, how wearily! far away.

She carried this book upstairs to her own room, and then unlocking her desk, took out from it a morocco case. For a moment she hesitated, and laid it on the table as if she shrank from opening it; then suddenly changing her mind, she touched the spring, and gazed at the portrait it contained, long and earnestly.

It was that of a man, young and handsome, wear-

ing a full-dress military uniform, and was beautifully executed ; but it was not a pleasant face. There was something Jewish (but slightly developed though) in the shape of this dark, selfish, sensual countenance, which looked out at you with a sullen, half-defiant expression, as if conscious of misdeeds and treachery which he dared you to discover. He seemed to be about twenty-nine or thirty years of age, and wore a heavy moustache, and was leaning in the portrait, which was half-length, on the handle of his sword, grasping it with a strong, white, bony hand, with a grasp which looked of iron.

Presently Miss Williams laid this picture side by side together on the table with that of George—of George as he was now—looking from one to the other; then with sudden passion she caught up that of the soldier, and flung it angrily on the floor.

“ Would I had never seen you ! ” she said—
“ would I had died before I had ever seen your face ! ”
—the selfish, sensual face, that seemed to look at her from the ground with a cold and hateful smile. She glanced at it once more, then crushing it violently with the heel of her boot, broke the glass into a hundred pieces.

“ May I never see you again ! ” she cried—“ never, never ! ” and she lifted up the disfigured and broken portrait, and flung it into the fire which was burning brightly on the hearth, watching it eagerly till

the flames had totally consumed it; and then, with a deep long sigh, she turned away, and, going to the table, knelt down and laid her head on George's picture.

"I may not be worthy of you, George," she said, in a low sad tone. "I am not worthy of you, my dear; but God grant—oh! God grant I may never see that man again."

She heard them come home—lying grieving and heart-sick—heard them laughing and talking, and felt she was forgotten by them all. "What am I to them?" she thought, "a stranger, and ill; what do they care?" But presently there came a little rap at the door, and the sweet childish face of Milly looked inquiringly in.

"Are you asleep?" she asked in a whisper.

"No, Milly. What is it?"

"I came to see how you were," said the child, advancing into the room, and looking beautiful in the ball dress which George had chosen. "I came to see how your head was, and to know if there was anything you would like to take? Mamma told me to ask."

"It is aching very much, Milly."

"Oh! I'm so sorry; and so, so sorry you weren't there. It was beautiful—splendid! And oh, Miss Williams, look what Hugh gave me off the tree," and she held up the locket with the cross of pearls,

on which he had written her name the night before.

"Isn't it lovely?" continued Milly, in raptures ;
"and real gold too. I asked Hugh, and he said it was."

"It is very pretty, Milly."

"And—and, Miss Williams, I've a message for you."

"And who is that from?"

"From Hugh ; he told me to say—oh, so many things ; but first was, that he hoped he had not vexed you, and how sorry he was you were ill ; he said I had to say that he would see you and explain. Yes, I think that was what he said ; but I couldn't quite understand him, because he said it was a secret—a secret between you and him ; and he said it would always be a secret if you wished it. I was to be sure to remember *that* ; and he said also you were to have your present off the Christmas tree, and he sent you this ; and he hoped you would like it better than the earrings which he chose for you last night ;" and Milly produced from the pocket of her dress a handsome locket set with turquoises.

"I cannot take that, Milly."

"Oh ! but you must ; every one got something. Mamma such a lovely bag, and Lady Lilbourne, and their governess, and every one ; so why

shouldn't you? Hugh said you were to take it."

"You must give it back to him for me."

"Oh no, do take it," urged the child. "See how pretty it is—almost the prettiest thing there was there."

"Well, Milly, I will give it back to Sir Hugh myself—perhaps that would be better."

"No, you must keep it. Hugh was so nice—not a bit cross, as he sometimes is. I wish you had seen him; and he told me not to let Adelaide see your locket, because—and he laughed and said something funny."

"What did he say?"

"He said—only you mustn't tell Adelaide—that a woman was always jealous of anyone who was prettier than herself and that Adelaide was jealous of you; and so she is—at least Dolly is always saying so."

"And how often did you dance with Sir Hugh to have all this conversation?"

"Oh! ever so many times. But I'll tell you all about it. Well, we had dined first—only just us you know, and before we were finished the other people began to come; then we had tea, laid out in the room where we had tea that night we went with Georgie, long ago. Then Hugh said, 'Now gentlemen, choose your partners,' and we went into the big dining-room to dance. Oh! it looked

such a size, with almost everything taken out, and at one end—the far end—was the *Tree*. Oh, Miss Williams, if you had seen it ! all bright and shining, and glittering with hundreds and hundreds of candles—and such lovely things—dolls, and rings, and earrings, and hoops, and balls, and all sorts of toys ; and I cannot tell what else, hanging in rows on the branches. But we only looked at them then ; and then we danced—ever so long ; and after that an old man-servant threw open a door just beside the tree, and we went into another room for supper—such a beautiful supper !—turkeys, and jellies, and ices, and everything—and such lots of crackers, funny ones, you know, and all kinds. Then Hugh came and took me back first into the dining-room again, to be the fairy to dispense his gifts, he said ; and he handed all the pretty things off the tree to me, and told me who I had to give them to. So I gave them away, and every one laughed, and the boys hurraed and made such a noise ; and then we danced again—and then—yes, that was all—we came away.”

“ You must have had a pleasant night of it, Milly.”

“ Oh yes ! but I was so sorry you were not there. I thought of you, and wished you were—you and Georgie.”

“ You were a good little girl, not to forget your friends among all the fine people.”

"How could I do that?" answered the child, innocently. "I never could forget you and Georgie."

"George should have been there."

"I wish he had. I wonder what he is doing now."

"Asleep, Milly, I should think—asleep."

"Perhaps he's dreaming of us," said the child, and her governess sighed as she spoke.

The next morning Miss Williams heard the same account from every one of Sir Hugh's party. It had been a success, and Sir Hugh himself had been everything that a host could be.

Adelaide came down to breakfast wearing the massive gold bracelet he had presented to her, looking flushed, excited, and happy; she even condescended to speak to Miss Williams, and asked her after her health.

"You should have been there; it was the prettiest sight!" she continued—"Oh! so different to the party in the schoolroom here. The old noble room looked so well—it needed no paltry decorations. Certainly Hugh knows how to do a thing well when he does it—doesn't he, papa?"

"Hugh has eleven thousand a year," replied the Vicar, with a shrug.

"Ah!—but it isn't money—it's"—and she paused. She was in too good a humour even to insult her stepmother.

All the children looked well and happy after their gaiety, but Bonny. Bonny's face was flushed, and her head ached, and she cried, very unlike her usual good-natured fat little self, when Dolly accidentally touched her arm at the breakfast table—cried, and would not be comforted, and finally sobbed herself to sleep upon her mother's knee.

At dinner it was the same thing. She was cross and peevish, and could not eat, and complained of sore throat; and Mrs. Manners began to look at her anxiously as the day wore on, and at night she grew even more restless and fretful.

"I am afraid Bonny is very poorly," said Mrs. Manners, coming into the schoolroom where Miss Williams and the two eldest children were sitting, about eight o'clock in the evening. "I wish, my dear, you would come with me, and see what you think."

Miss Williams rose and followed Mrs. Manners at once to the nursery, where Milly and Bonny slept, and she and the anxious mother stood for a few moments in silence by her little cot watching the sleeping child.

Bonny was lying with both her arms thrown over the bedclothes, and her face was deeply flushed; and while they were standing she began to talk in a strange, unnatural voice in her sleep.

"She is very hot," said Miss Williams, in a whisper.

"She's feverish, I'm afraid," answered Mrs. Manners.

Miss Williams looked round at Milly, who was also asleep in a cot at the other side of the room, with her perfect face, placid and holy as an angel's, turned towards them ; and so lovely did she look at that moment that Miss Williams could not repress her admiration.

"How beautiful she is !" she said.

"Yes ;" and Mrs. Manners glanced round for a second, but the next, her eyes turned back to her sick darling. "I don't like Bonny's looks," she said ; "I must have the Vicar up to see her."

"The child's got a feverish cold ; don't you bother yourself about her, Nelly," said Mr. Manners, when he had been brought up to inspect his youngest daughter.

"At all events, let us be on the safe side," said Miss Williams. "Let me carry Milly, Mrs. Manners, to my bed for the night."

"If you enjoy having your rest disturbed by a kicking child, certainly," answered the Vicar. "It is very good-natured of you to propose it, Miss Williams ; but my advice, for your sake, would be—let her alone."

"It never would disturb me to have Milly," replied, Miss Williams, with a smile ; and so Milly, only half awake, was carried in a shawl to her room,

and Mrs. Manners slept in the nursery beside her darling.

In the morning, however, there was no longer any doubt that Bonny was ill. The child was evidently in a fever, and seemed scarcely conscious, and was unable to be completely roused; and the neighbouring doctor having been hastily summoned, he at once pronounced it to be a case of scarlet fever.

When this alarming news spread through the household, Adelaide immediately declared she must leave. Scarlet fever was fatal, she said, to grown-up people, and she was not going to risk the chance of infection.

"Where shall I go, papa?" she asked, with an anxious face.

"And your sisters, Adelaide," replied the Vicar, "would you leave them?"

"It is not dangerous—at least so dangerous, for children; and besides, I have no doubt Mrs. Manners has brought the infection into the house by having all those horrible people about," answered his daughter.

"You heard the doctor say there was no case in the village," said the Vicar, "so you need not say that."

"I don't believe in doctors—and I'm determined to go."

"No one wishes to keep you, my dear, so don't

alarm yourself. But as my other children are also to be considered, you must not be quite in such haste."

At this point of the conversation, Sir Hugh, with, his gun and dogs, was seen coming up the avenue.

"There is Hugh!" cried Adelaide, running to the door. "I must stop him; he must not come in." But when in a hurried manner she explained, as she opened the hall door for her cousin, that he must not enter, Sir Hugh only laughed at her terror.

"Don't be such a child, Adelaide," he said. "What folly! I'm not more likely to take it than the rest. I hope that little Milly wont, though. Where is my uncle?"

"In the dining-room. Oh, Hugh, what a risk for you to run!"

"Nonsense, nonsense. Well, uncle, so you have got a little invalid upstairs, I hear?"

"Yes; and Adelaide——" then the Vicar prudently paused. He had no wish to stop his daughter's matrimonial advancement for any little private opinion of his own—"and Adelaide," he added, "is very anxious about infection for the rest of the children, and apparently for you."

"Like an amiable cousin, as she is," said Sir Hugh, looking round at her with a smile.

"Well, it is dangerous," said Adelaide, blushing.

"A bright idea has struck me," went on Sir Hugh. "Suppose you Adelaide, the three young-

sters, and their governess come up to the Hall? I know it's no use asking Mrs. Manners, who of course wont leave her darling; but if you, uncle, will come too, and put up with a bachelor's fare, I need scarcely say how welcome you will be; and stay as long as you like of course, even if I am not there. It's Adelaide's old home, you know, and I can leave her as *châtelaine* to you all."

Adelaide coloured with pleasure as her cousin said this.

"It is too good of you, Hugh," she said, "too unselfish, to be bothered with a lot of children."

"Don't you know my future wife's among them? Milly has promised to marry me, uncle, when she is eighteen, if I'm a good boy—a very good boy, she says, till then; of which, I confess, she seemed to have some reasonable doubt."

"Well, Hugh, if you mean your offer, I don't see how they could do better," said the Vicar, who saw a pleasant prospect of saving his pocket by accepting it.

"Of course I mean it. Come at once; I leave the arrangement of beds, rooms, etcetera, to Adelaide, who knows all the resources of the old place."

"I of course will stay at home," answered Mr. Manners, "but I thank you heartily, Hugh, for thinking of it."

"I wont make any polite speeches, but it's a

pleasure to me, I assure you—are you not my own people? Ah! Miss Williams”—for that young lady at this moment entered the room, not knowing Sir Hugh was there—“I hope you are better; I was truly sorry not to see you the other night, and truly sorry also for the cause. I hope the head is quite well now?”

“Yes, thank you,” answered Miss Williams. “It was you, Mr. Manners,” she continued, “I wished to see. Dr. Ruthyen said Bonny’s medicine had to be sent for at once, and Mrs. Manners told me to ask you to send James for it.”

“To be sure,” said the Vicar, “and there’s an invitation come for you all already this morning.”

“And what may that be?”

“It is from me,” said Sir Hugh. “I hear you have got fever in the house, so I have asked my cousins—and I am glad to say they have accepted—to come up to the Hall till all danger of infection is past, and I hope you will accompany them.”

“You are very kind, Sir Hugh, but I am going to stay with Mrs. Manners, to help her to nurse Bonny.”

“But there is danger in that, is there not, for a young person like you?”

“I do not know, I do not think of it; but if there were ever so much I would not leave her. I could not leave Mrs. Manners alone.”

"It is very unselfish of you," said Sir Hugh, looking at the governess fixedly. He was wondering what could be her motive. "Mrs. Manners is happy in having inspired you with so much affection," he continued.

"She has been very kind to me," answered Miss Williams, simply. "I could not think of leaving her just now."

"It is very creditable to you, that is all I can say," said the Vicar. "I don't believe much in infection myself, except with children, in such a case as this, but still both my wife and I feel very much obliged to you, Miss Williams."

"I must be the loser then," said Sir Hugh, with a touch of admiration in his voice; "and I can only assure Miss Williams how much I shall—how much we all shall—regret her absence. But, Adelaide, I must be going. It is eleven now, by twelve I hope to see the whole of you at the Hall—my little wife included. Mind tell her not to forget our engagement;" and with a general bow to them all, Sir Hugh took up his gun, whistled for his dogs, and went away.





CHAPTER XIV.

"THE FIRST DARK DAY OF BITTERNESS."

THE house seemed very quiet for the next few days—very still and silent. There were no merry voices of children heard in the lower rooms ; no tumbles on the old broad stairs. Bonny, the little one, the darling, lay tossing on her fevered bed, and Mrs. Manners and Miss Williams crept about with noiseless footsteps, and spoke in anxious whispers during the long hours of their painful watch.

From the very first, Mr. Ruthyen the doctor had said it was a bad case, and as day after day passed away with no change for the better, so did hope turn her bright face to the wall, and sickening fear, and terrible doubts, began to fill the poor mother's sinking heart.

Only at rare intervals Bonny was now sensible ; waking up sometimes and talking of "Hugh's tree," her doll, and "Georgie ;" and once or twice she asked where the others were ; but in general, a kind of stupor seemed to oppress her, and on the

seventh day after her seizure, the doctor beckoned Miss Williams out, when he was leaving the sick room.

"It's as well it were broken to poor Mrs. Manners," he said in a loud whisper, after closing the door behind them; "there's no hope, the child will die."

"Oh, doctor!"

"There's no hope," he repeated. "I've done what I could; but if they'd like other advice, well and good; but it's no use."

"How can I tell it?—How can I tell poor Mrs. Manners?"

"Tell the Vicar that would be the best way," said the doctor, putting on his gloves. "It's as well they should know—she wont last twenty-four hours;" and he took up his hat and went away, reading the newspaper as he was driven to his next patient.

"Oh, Mr. Manners!" said Miss Williams, a minute afterwards, opening the door of the study, her eyes streaming with tears.

"What!" said the Vicar, starting up. "Is Bonny worse?"

"How can I tell you?" answered Miss Williams, holding out her hand to him. "Our darling is dying."

"What!" and the Vicar's face grew pale. He

never cared to hear of death or danger, and Bonny was his favourite—his youngest.

“ Dr. Ruthyen has just told me so.”

“ He’s a fool !” said the Vicar, excitedly, “ a confounded fool ! I’ll telegraph to George at once to bring out a physician from Oldcastle.”

“ Mr. George is in London.”

“ To be sure—how stupid of him going off at a moment’s notice. Ruthyen is a fool to go and say such a thing. Does poor Nelly know ?”

“ No, I could not tell her. Oh, Mr. Manners, do not go away, I cannot be left ;” for the Vicar was gathering up his things in preparation for departure.

“ I must, Miss Williams. Don’t stop me ; I am going to the station to telegraph to Oldcastle for a doctor.”

“ And poor Mrs. Manners ?”

“ Don’t tell her. Tell her he doesn’t think her quite so well ; that’s enough ;” and Mr. Manners hurried upstairs to change his coat, while Miss Williams was left alone with her terrible news.

“ What did the doctor say ?” inquired the eager mother, the moment she re-appeared in the sick room.

“ He does not think her quite so well this morning,” answered Miss Williams, struggling for composure.

"Not so well? Oh, Amy!" and the colour faded completely out of the poor mother's face, and she fell down on her knees by the little bed, praying aloud—"Oh God! spare her—spare my darling—my little one. Oh God! have mercy—have mercy upon us!"

That cry of anguish, so loud and so bitter, seemed somehow to reach even the dulled ears of the motionless and dying child, for the next moment Bonny opened her dim eyes and gazed wildly round; throwing up her arms and struggling as if for breath.

"What is it, my darling?" said Mrs. Manners, rising and lifting her up.

"Don't let me go, mamma!" cried Bonny; "don't let me go!" But the mother's fond arms could no longer hold her darling, and after a few brief struggles more, Bonny passed silently away.

"She—she is better now," said Mrs. Manners, laying her head gently down on the pillow after all was still.

"Come away, dear Mrs. Manners," said Amy Williams, weeping—"come away, our little angel is gone."

"What?" cried the mother in a loud voice; "what, *dead*?—no, no, no—wake up, my darling—wake, Bonny, wake!" and she lifted the child once more in her arms. "Wake, my darling—it is

mamma, mamma; I wont let you go, I wont let you go!" But the little one's dim eyes again slowly opened, and with a shriek the wretched mother saw the truth, and fell in strong convulsions on the floor.

Miss Williams scarcely knew how the rest of that wretched day was spent. Mrs. Manners went from one fit into the other, and at night was pronounced by the doctor to be in a high fever—to be in danger; and the Vicar seemed quite stunned and incapable of action.

"Will you telegraph for George?" said Miss Williams at last to him, and he eagerly seized on this relief.

"Yes, yes, to be sure. Why did you not think of it before?" he said. "I'll get Jim to drive me to the station;" and he hurried out, and Miss Williams remained alone with the delirious woman, calling in piteous accents for her dead child.

"Sir Hugh has come, Miss, and wants to see you," said a servant presently, entering the room. "He sent this card," and she held out a few pencilled lines.

"Come down and speak to me for a moment," he had written; and after a slight hesitation Miss Williams complied with his request.

Sir Hugh was standing in the dining-room, as

she went in, and he advanced to meet her, holding out his hand.

"No, it is better not," said Miss Williams, drawing back; "you have heard the news, I suppose?"

"The little girl is dead; but what about poor Mrs. Manners? I hear she has also taken the fever."

"She is very ill."

"I am truly sorry. I heard so, and came at once. Can I do anything for you? telegraph for doctors—or anything you want? I think Mrs. Manners should have further advice."

"The Vicar was just going to telegraph to Old-castle this morning when poor Bonny died; and now he seems hardly to understand what to do."

"I will go myself if you wish it."

"You are very good, Sir Hugh. You might, perhaps, telegraph if you know of any one you would like to see her. The Vicar has gone to the station to do so to George now."

"I will go at once then to meet him, and we can consult who to send for. Is there anything else I can do? pray command me if there is."

"No, I think nothing; but, Sir Hugh, I thank you—for thinking of us in our grief."

"I'm not quite so black as I'm painted, perhaps—as well as another gentleman we know of,"

said Sir Hugh, smiling and holding her hand. "Good night, Miss Williams, I think it is I who ought to thank you, for acting a daughter's part to my uncle's poor wife upstairs;" and Sir Hugh took up his cap and went away; and the governess stood for a few minutes after he was gone, with a thoughtful and anxious face.

All the next day Mrs. Manners continued very ill, and the next as well. Then she grew weaker and quieter; and the doctor from Oldcastle, whom Sir Hugh and the Vicar had sent for, and who now came each morning to meet the country practitioner, began to look very grave.

"It is a critical case," he said, and left minute directions, and inquired of Miss Williams if she were the invalid's daughter.

"You are not quite strong enough for this work, I see," he said, looking at Miss Williams's white scared face in the morning light. "You want rest. If Mrs. Manners is not better to-morrow, I will send a nurse out by the evening train."

Miss Williams was, in truth, utterly worn out; for, added to her anxiety about Mrs. Manners, all the painful details of poor Bonny's funeral had also fallen on her hands. The Vicar sat in his study the most part of the day, and declared he could not see after it; that he was utterly overcome, and consoled himself with constant supplies of whisky

today ; scarcely ever going up to the sick-room beside his wife. " His feelings were too much for him," he said, and Miss Williams had to see after everything herself.

There is nothing more painful and trying to our frail frames than continuous night nursing. In vain the poor governess, on the third night of Mrs. Manners's illness, tried to keep her eyes open. Close they would before the hour the housemaid had promised to relieve her ; and the tick, tick of the clock on the mantelpiece was growing fainter to her ears, when she suddenly started, for she heard a step on the gravel beneath, and, at once rousing up, listened to the gentle ring at the door bell, and felt almost sure that George Manners had arrived.

A few minutes later, and she heard his footsteps on the stairs ; and then there came a low rap at the door, and when she rose to open it George Manners stood before her, and silently held out his hand.

" Is she better?" he whispered.

" She is quieter—yes, perhaps a little better," said Miss Williams. " Will you come in ? she will not hear you."

George followed Miss Williams to his step-mother's bedside, and stood for a moment or two looking at her, as if he were wondering at the change.

"Is she asleep?" he said at last, touching her hand.

"I think not; she generally lies like that now."

"And you?" said Mr. Manners, turning round and fixing his eyes on Miss Williams's face.

"Oh!—I'm——"

"About done, I see. Have you no nurse?"

"Dr. Philips will send one to-morrow, he said, if Mrs. Manners is not better; but I hope she will not be needed. But come downstairs for a few minutes now. I will tell Ann to come here; she is sitting up."

"Very well," said George Manners, and he left the room.

Miss Williams went into her own and bathed her face, when the servant came, before she went down to him. She was conscious, perhaps, how nights of anxiety and watching had told on her appearance, and did not care that he should see her looking so wan and ill.

George was standing by the dining-room fire when she entered the room, and an easy-chair was pushed close to the hearth.

"Come and sit here," he said. "I want you to tell me all about them; but first take this," and he filled a glass with some wine and handed it to her.

"Thank you," said Miss Williams, wearily. "Oh, I'm so glad, so thankful you have come."

"Drink the wine, and don't speak for a few minutes. I got the telegram in Essex late last night. I was staying out of town; that is the reason I did not come before."

"I have scarcely known what to do."

"Where are the rest?"

"At Sir Hugh's;" and George frowned as she spoke.

"That's some of Adelaide's arrangement, of course," he said.

"No; Sir Hugh came the moment he heard poor Bonny was ill, and wanted every one to go."

"And you did not?"

"How could I have left your mother?"

George was silent.

"I am only too thankful if I have been of any use to her," went on Miss Williams.

"I am very grateful to you."

"You need not say that."

"But you are not fit to do it," said George, looking at her. "Have you seen a doctor?"

"I see them every day, of course."

"I mean about yourself?"

"Oh no!"

"Then you should; you look utterly worn out. What has my father been doing, so entirely to neglect you?"

"He felt poor Bonny's death very much. But

you, Mr. Manners—you don't look well. Are you very tired?"

"I am well enough; don't you mind about me."

Miss Williams made no reply, but sighed deeply, and George, as he heard it, turned his head sharply away.

"Would you like to see Bonny?" she asked in a few minutes.

"Is—the poor child—is——" and he stopped.

"She has to be buried to-morrow. She is lying in her little coffin in the nursery."

"It is not right for you to go," said George, abruptly.

"Oh! I've been there constantly. I've never left her, or your poor mother."

"You—you are——" and George paused, and bit his lips, and Miss Williams saw he was trembling violently.

"Not so very bad, perhaps," she said gently, with a smile, holding out her hand to him. "Come, George, let us go and look at our little darling."

But George did not take the hand she held to him, but merely followed her from the room.

Bonny's coffin was lying on the little bed where she had died. It was not closed, and the lovely small waxen face within looked lovelier than it had ever done in life.

For a few minutes George stood silently looking at her ; then, in that strange stern voice, which with him indicated much emotion, he said—

“ How like Milly she is—too like !”

“ Yes.”

“ Did she suffer much ?” he asked presently.

“ Oh no ! oh, I don’t think so ; she struggled a little at the end.”

“ She has escaped early,” said George, stooping down and kissing her. “ Good-bye, Bonny—good-bye, little Bonny ;” and Amy Williams noticed he left a tear on the fair white face.

“ Good-bye, Bonny !” she said, and she also kissed the cold cheek, and then George waited for her, and locked the door behind her as she went out.

“ You must go to bed now,” he said, “ I am going to sit up with my mother.”

“ No, indeed.”

“ I mean to do so. You must have a night’s rest.”

“ But after your journey ?”

“ I am not tired,” he answered ; “ and I’ve much to think of ;” and he held out his hand to her, and as he did so, she noticed how care-worn and altered he looked.

“ Good night !” he said, and without another word he turned away.

She slept so soundly, being utterly worn out with fatigue, that she never awoke till a servant brought up her breakfast on the following morning.

"Mr. George said I was to say he hoped you were better, miss," said the girl.

"Yes," answered Miss Williams, and she put her hands up to her heavy and swollen eyes—"yes," but felt so completely weary as if she never wished to rise again.

"The joiner's coming to screw the coffin down at ten, miss ; is that right?"

These words restored her to some energy.

"How can I lie here," she thought, "and leave him all this pain? I will get up at once, Jane," she said, "and see about everything."

"Oh! but please miss, Mr. George said you hadn't to get up—at least, that I had to light your fire first; and the poker's in to do it."

"Never mind the fire; I'll soon be dressed." But it made her heart lighter to think he had not forgotten a trifle like this.

She found the Vicar and his son sitting together over their breakfast, downstairs.

"How are you, my dear?" said the Vicar, rising and holding out a shaking hand to her as she entered. "I don't know what I should have done without her, George!" he continued, in a sudden burst of gratitude; "she has been what Adelaide

ought to have been—she has taken a daughter's place."

"I am sure I have done nothing—only my duty to those who have been so kind to me," said Miss Williams.

"I'll say no more; but I won't forget it," answered the Vicar; "as long as I have a house over my head, you are welcome to the place you have taken there—a daughter's place."

George rose abruptly from the table as his father said this, and went to the window, looking out at the cold grey sky.

"You've seen all about the sad arrangements, I suppose, my dear?" continued the Vicar.

"Yes, I hope so."

"Have you asked any one? You will have asked Hugh, of course?"

"No, I never thought of it."

"Oh! that's a pity. Hugh should have been asked; the head of the house, you see. I'm afraid he'll think it odd. Don't you think so, George?"

"What folly!" said George, angrily, turning round, "as if a man like Hugh cared a straw for all the poor children in the world."

"But there's a certain etiquette, my dear fellow."

"Then I think you should have seen to it," muttered George.

"Well, well, it's too late now. You'll give all the directions to the men, Miss Williams?"

"I will, father; excuse me," said George, coming forward to the table; "but a delicate woman like Miss Williams is not the proper person. I will see everything is right, if you"—and he turned to Miss Williams—"will stay with my mother; and try not to let her know anything unusual is going on in the house."

"I will gladly do so," she answered. "What do you think of Mrs. Manners?" she added, "and how did she pass the night?"

"She knew me as the day broke," said George; "and seemed pleased to find me at home. I hope and trust she is going to pull through. I think the worst is over."

"I could not bear it if anything were to happen to her," said the Vicar. "Poor thing! she has been an excellent wife to me!" and the Vicar, who really looked much scared and shaken, shuffled in his slippers out of the room.

"Poor father!" said George, looking after him, with a smile; "how tender he is to his own feelings—how considerate to himself!"

Miss Williams smiled also. "It's a good thing to carry about with one in the world, I think," she said.

"What, selfishness?"

"A little, I mean."

"I am sorry to hear you say so. No, it is a bad thing; it saps, I think, every noble and generous feeling of the heart."

"Ah, but the human heart is such a strange thing; it is impossible to account for it."

"Ay, you may well say so."

"But I must go now, and see after Mrs. Manners."

"Yes; keep everything from her that you can; and—and, Miss Williams, before you go, there is one thing—I would not have you think that I am not grateful."

"Indeed, you have no reason to be so."

"Let me judge of that; and though selfishness is a bad thing," he added, with a kind of smile, "don't quite forget yourself. You really look very ill."

He walked up and down the room some minutes after she had left, and then, with a heavy sigh, went out to see about his little sister's grave.

Two men were digging it in the churchyard when he got there; the one who was inside, his head nearly level with the sod, was whistling at his work.

"Well, my men," said George, somewhat sternly. He forgot for the moment that his grief was not theirs.

"Well, Master George—it's cold this morning," said the man in the grave, looking up. "So the little one's gat away. How's the mistress?"

"She is better," said George, turning aside. "See that everything is ready in an hour," he added, and held out some silver to the men, feeling unreasonably angry at their indifference.

"Yet they have seen her a thousand times," he thought bitterly—"the merry little child, so soon to lie in that cold bed!"

As he was leaving the graveyard he met Sir Hugh Manners.

"I hear little Bonny has to be buried this morning, George," he said, holding out his hand—"I should like to come;" and George could not refuse his hand to the man who made the kindly offer.

"They talked something about asking you," he murmured in reply, "but poor Miss Williams——"

"Has behaved like a brick! Upon my word, I am beginning to think——" and Sir Hugh stopped suddenly.

"Will you come into the house?" said George. "But perhaps you had better not."

"Adelaide goes on like a wild thing if I come near. She declared I had brought infection the other night, when I saw Miss Williams for a few minutes."

"Ay."

"I saw her when I heard poor Mrs. Manners had taken ill. She asked me to telegraph to Oldcastle for Dr. Philips."

"Didn't my father do that?" said George, quickly.

"My dear fellow, your father will go the way of my father if he doesn't take care. I expect he'll have an attack of delirium tremens before long. He was in a frightful state at the station the other night."

"How disgraceful!"

"It's to drown his grief, I suppose," said Sir Hugh, with a laugh; then seeing George's look of pain, he added, "but I am truly sorry about the little girl."

"And Milly?" asked George.

"What a lovely child that is. They talk about angels—she's as good as one any day of the week. What an unselfish pure little thing! I sit and look at her for hours. I wish there were more like her."

"She's a dear little girl; give her my love."

"You won't be allowed to come up for a few days to see us, I suppose?"

"No; I'll return to Oldcastle as soon as I see how Mrs. Manners's illness turns."

"She is a kind creature, people say," said Sir Hugh; "and tell your little governess——"

"Good morning," said George, abruptly, interrupting him; "I have some things to see after. The funeral, if you really wish to come, is at one o'clock;" and Sir Hugh, taking the hint, nodded to his cousin, and turned back on his way to the Hall.

It was raining heavily when they carried the little child away. Rain, mixed with drifting sleet and snow, beat on the few mourners as they stood round the narrow grave. Sir Hugh Manners came, and George, and all the old servants. Who was there else? The true mourner—the grief-stricken mother—lay unconscious upstairs, and who else cared that another little child was gone?

"Good-bye, Hugh," said George, holding out his hand, as they were leaving the grave, with something of his old manner towards his cousin. "Good-bye; I thank you for coming."

"Good-bye, old fellow," answered Sir Hugh, and they parted at the church gates.

George shivered as he walked home, and shivered when he reached it, and tried to warm himself by the blazing fire. The Vicar retired at once to his study, from whence a faint odour of hot whisky and water presently issued; and George felt utterly miserable and depressed.

"Why are we born," he thought bitterly, "always, always to suffer? There seems no end to it

on earth ;” and he sat down, crouching close to the fire.

Presently, however, some one rapped at the door, and he lifted his head to bid the applicant enter.

“Come in,” he said, and the door opened, and Miss Williams, dressed in mourning, came and stood beside him.

“I saw you come home,” she said ; “I was watching. So it is all over ?”

“Yes.”

“How did the Vicar go through it ?”

“He read the service with great expression.”

“Oh, Mr. Manners !”

“Well, don’t you believe me ?”

“I don’t know.”

“Will you sit down ? How are you ?—you look very pale. Jane tells me my mother has never stirred since we went out.”

“No, poor thing.”

“She will get better, I hope.”

“Yes ;” and there was an embarrassing pause.

“I—I hope they see after you ?” presently said Miss Williams, glancing round ; “you have not Mrs. Manners now.”

“Yes, thank you ; everything is all right, except my head,” he added, with a sort of laugh.

“Does it ache ?”

"Yes, horribly."

"I am very sorry—George, have you forgiven me yet?" and she held out her hand to him—he sitting there by the fire, and she standing in her black dress by his side.

He made no answer, but he held her hand—held it as if half unconsciously ; bending down his head still lower, till his dark hair touched her dress.

"You judged me harshly," said Miss Williams, "I want you to believe that."

"Very well," said he, almost in a whisper.

"I have so few friends," she went on, "I cannot afford to lose you."

George gave a heavy sigh.

"Besides, I—I think it grieves you to think ill of me. George, do not do so any more."

"Don't," said George Manners, rising hastily, "don't speak to me—don't look at me like that."

"I did not mean to annoy you."

"I feel wretchedly ill, and out of sorts—partly with fatigue, I suppose ; and I'm not up to any—well, painful discussions to-day."

"I do not wish to have any—only I wish you to say just once—I forgive you."

"Well," said he, coming to her side, "I forgive you."

"And we are friends?" and she once more held out her hand.

"Amy, you ask too much."

"No," said she, earnestly, "I do not. George, I cannot do without your friendship now."

He looked at her long and earnestly after she said this, and then slowly put his hand into hers.

"Let it be as you will," he said. "I cannot look at you and not trust you. Come to me always, as you would to a brother."

"You have made me very happy," answered Amy Williams, with a soft, fond smile. "Good-bye for the present — good-bye, my brother George."





CHAPTER XV.

A PROPOSAL.

MRS. MANNERS'S health improved a little during the next few days. Still her weakness and prostration was wonderful, considering how strong and healthy had formerly been her frame ; and a certain listless and wearied expression settled down on her face, which even the presence and constant affection and attention of her dear stepson failed to dispel.

She had got a blow in fact—the first in her bright, cheerful, happy, pious life ; and she could not reconcile her mind to admit the justice of the awful Hand which had snatched her innocent darling from her breast, and terrible doubts, awful misgivings and fear, began for the first time to distract and unsettle her belief.

She, however, confided these miserable struggles to no human soul. “Why should I fill his mind with such dreadful thoughts ?” the good and simple creature would say to herself a hundred times, as she looked at George's hard, worn face.

"He does not seem so happy as it is," she often thought, and kept wondering if he and Amy Williams were fully reconciled; and used to extol that young lady in the highest terms, and could not understand the sad and sickly smile which was her stepson's usual answer to these commendations.

"She has been a daughter to me," she said to him one afternoon, a few days after poor Bonny's funeral; "and a good daughter makes a good wife, George;" but George only smiled in reply.

"She has gone down to the village now," Mrs. Manners went on, "the first time she has been out since our darling died, to see a poor girl who is in a consumption there, and she makes the soup for the poor women, and looks after the house as well as if I were about myself."

"She looks very delicate," said George.

"Yes—but then she's gone through so much—and she's fretting perhaps, George, about you."

"We are very good friends, mother—now."

"She likes you, I am sure," said Mrs. Manners.

"Hush, mother, hush, you must not say that. Shall I read to you, the afternoon must seem so long?"

For about half-an-hour, till the light grew dim, George read aloud to his mother, and then looking up he found she had fallen quietly asleep; so

noiselessly he went from the bed to the window, and stood gazing disconsolately out.

Presently he saw Amy Williams coming up the avenue, returning from her visit to the village, and unwilling to be seen apparently watching for her, he went to the fire and sat down in the easy-chair, where through so many long hours she had lately kept a weary watch.

Some thought of this crossed his mind at the present moment, for her devotion and kindness to his stepmother had really greatly influenced him; though in his manner he still showed very little of the friendship which on the day of the funeral she had asked him to restore. George Manners, in fact, honest and single-minded himself, shrank with horror from the idea of any double-dealing or concealment about the woman he loved. "What had been her connexion with Hugh Manners?" How often, during his cold and lonely journey on the New Year, had he asked himself this question!—how often he asked it of himself now!

At first, in his passionate jealousy and love, he had put the very worst construction on their, to him, evident previous acquaintance. But when he watched this girl—so modest, yet tender; so earnest in her duties, and apparently so anxious to regain his good opinion and regard, he began to modify his original conviction, and to speculate on what possible secret there

could be between his cousin and the woman he had once hoped so fondly to call his wife.

"Perhaps some girlish folly," he thought, as he sat there in the gathering twilight; "some childish escapade, repented of the moment it was done. Hugh Manners is just the man to take advantage of any woman who was ever foolish enough to trust him;" and he bit his lips, the old jealous pang stabbing into his heart, keen as at the first moment when he learnt she and Sir Hugh Manners had met before.

"Yet she received him as a stranger," he reflected bitterly, remembering their introduction in the schoolroom. "Commend me to a woman for being a hypocrite! Who, looking at her innocent face, could think she could be so deceitful as she is?"

The owner of the "innocent face," just at that moment when he had worked himself into a rage, came into the room, and, seeing George sitting by the fire, walked quietly up and stood beside his chair.

"Is she asleep?" she whispered, bending her head slightly down; and as the firelight flickered on her sweet face George gave almost a groan, and turned himself passionately away.

"What is it? George, what is it? She isn't—oh! she is not——" and Amy stopped, a terrible fear paralysing her speech.

"No, no," answered George, impatiently—"no; she is well. Good God! what makes you turn so white? Are you going to faint?"

"You frightened me," said Amy, in a low, trembling voice, putting her hand to her side, a deadly feeling of faintness creeping over her. "I—I am very nervous just now."

"Sit here," said he. "Child, what is the matter with you? what makes you tremble like that?"

"It is nothing;" and she lay back her head on the chair and closed her eyes, George Manners standing beside her with love, anger, jealousy, and almost hatred beating together tumultuously in his heart.

"Are you better?" he said at last, as she sighed deeply, and once more slowly opened her eyes.

"Yes."

"You have walked too far."

"A little, perhaps."

"Why don't you take care of yourself?"

"It is no matter," answered Amy Williams; with some bitterness in her tone. She also had been angry with George during the last few days, for she had asked for his friendship, and apparently he had determined to bestow very little of it upon her.

"Why do you say that?" he asked, angrily. "Are you so——" and he paused.

"So what, Mr. Manners?"

"Unworthy," he thought; but he only bit his lips and turned away, walking restlessly up and down the room, forgetting in his anger the sick woman who was lying in the bed.

Miss Williams never turned her head to look after him, but continued in the same attitude, gazing mournfully into the fire; and at each turn George took down the room he looked eagerly at the pale, sorrowful young face, which he never could see and utterly distrust.

At last, as if he had made some resolution, or touched perhaps by some feeling of pity, he came up to her, laying his hand gently on her shoulder as he spoke.

"Amy," he said, "you are only a young girl—you have few friends, you say; clear yourself from a frightful suspicion in the mind of one of them. Tell me what it is Hugh Manners knows against you. Believe me, I will be no harsh or unkind judge."

But Miss Williams made no answer to this appeal; only large, heavy tears began to roll silently down her pale, thin face.

"Do not let me grieve you," said George, bending down over her. "God knows I would not willingly do that; but if you felt as I do—felt that this perhaps might be cleared away by a few honest words, you would not surely withhold them."

"I cannot tell you," said she, in a low tone, turning her face so as to touch his hand, which still rested on her shoulder. "George, I—I cannot tell you—but I am very unhappy."

"Is it some girlish folly that a dishonourable scoundrel like that might twist to his own purpose?" said George Manners. "Amy, I am a proud man—a harsh one, if you will—but if it is only folly, however great, however damning, I will still say—what I told you that night I meant to say—still say—give me a right to protect you from the lying tongues of such men as he is."

Still she made no answer, but drew his hand nearer to her; laying her wet face against that strong, firm palm.

"Do you love me?" he said, at last, after a few moments of painful silence.

"Yes," said she; "yes—George, I love you too well."

"What is it makes you hesitate, then? Is it the knowledge of your own guilt?" and unconsciously he grasped her hand as he spoke with such violence that she gave a cry of pain.

"No," she cried, springing up, and flinging back his hand, speaking hot and passionately. "No—for what do you take me, George Manners? Am I fallen so low as that?"

"God knows," he answered, bitterly, leaning his

head down on the old-fashioned mantelpiece. "I will ask you no more."

Neither spoke for the next few minutes; then George lifted up his head.

"We've had enough of this, I think," he said. "As long as I am here, let you and I keep as far apart as we can. We may as well drop that folly you talked the other day about friendship and brotherhood; you have no trust in me—nor I in you—so let it end."

"I do trust you," said Amy Williams.

"Perfectly!" answered George, scoffingly. "You have a secret with Hugh Manners—a secret too precious to be confided to the fool—who only cares for you too much."

"George," said Amy, gently laying her hand upon his arm, "you speak to me harshly—you treat me rudely—I, a woman unprotected, and alone. But one day I think you will judge me differently—one day you will be sorry for all your hard and cruel words."

"Will you tell me then some time—any time; but will you tell me?"

"Yes."

"Will you swear that you will? And one thing more, will this secret, whatever it is, make me—yes, make me curse the day I met you when it is mine?"

"I do not know," said Amy Williams, turning away her head.

"I would rather you were dead," said George Manners, in a low tone of intense emotion; "I would rather you were dead."

"I wish indeed that I were—oh! George, have you no pity?" she cried, coming near him, and flinging her arms about his neck. "Don't you see that I love you?—don't you see I am miserable—more miserable than you?"

For a moment he made a movement as if to repulse her; the next he clasped his arms round her, covering her lips and brow with passionate kisses.

"What is it?" he whispered; "what is it?—tell me now."

"Not shame, at any rate—not shame, George. Will you believe that?"

"Yes."

"I would tell you if I could; trust me a little longer—love me a little still."

"Yes—but——"

"You must not say *but*," whispered Amy, fondly.

"You must say *I will*."

"Well, I will."

"And you forgive me if I have made you unhappy?"

"Yes, child, yes—anything."

"And—and—now let me go."

"No," and he clasped her closer ; "no, not yet."

"Now?" said she, in a few minutes, lifting up her head.

"I am a fool," said George Manners, abruptly releasing her. "Ask me what you like—to marry you—to go down on my knees—to do anything—and I will do it."

"I ask you nothing, my dear, but to love and trust me a little still."

"And you love me?"

"Yes, though perhaps," and she sighed, "I should not say it."

"But you do?"

"Yes."

"Then I am content ; but oh ! Amy, listen to me. Do not rouse the devil within me. Do not let me think there is anything now, at least, between you and Hugh Manners."

"There is not."

"I will trust you," he said ; adding with a smile, glancing at the bed, "we have forgotten the poor mother all this time."

Mrs. Manners, however, had been awake for the last ten minutes ; and, looking up, had seen what certainly justified her in supposing that George and Miss Williams were engaged.

"Come here to me, my dears," she said, in her feeble, invalid voice. "Come, George, and Amy

too;" and when they went beside her, she held out her wasted hand.

"God bless you both!" she said. "George, be good to her, and love her truly all your life."

"Oh! Mrs. Manners, you must not think," stammered Miss Williams, her face covered with burning blushes, "you must not think that——"

"I have always known he loved you, dear," said Mrs. Manners. "Georgie does not keep many secrets from his old mother."

"But, George!" said Amy.

"Don't distress yourself; mother, Amy means she is not engaged to me yet. I have only taken her on trial," he continued, with a little laugh, holding out his hand to her. "You look after her, mother, and see that she is a good girl."

"I know she is," said Mrs. Manners.

"Is she?" said George, looking down at her with his dark clear eyes. "Yes, I believe she is;" and he drew nearer to her. "Amy, you will not deceive me?" he whispered.

"No," answered the girl, with a sigh and with downcast eyes; "no, George; but don't love me too well—don't forget I have a secret," she added, with a nervous little laugh.

"It has to be mine, some day," said George.

"And till then we will be friends?"

"Yes," and George laughed also—"dear friends."

George kept his word this time, and for the next few days he and Miss Williams were "dear friends." He left the next morning after their reconciliation, but returned late in the evening, his anxiety for his stepmother being his ostensible reason; but fond as he was of poor Mrs. Manners, as he had parted with her decidedly better in the morning, to travel sixty miles twice in one day was certainly a slight stretch of family affection.

"I will be at home all to-morrow," he said, when he came. "How lazy you make me, Miss Williams."

They then went up together, and sat by Mrs. Manners for nearly an hour, after he had taken some hasty refreshment downstairs. He was tired, but happy. There was a flush on his dark face, which had grown so worn and haggard of late, and a light in his eyes, which Amy had not seen since the unfortunate New Year; but there was no corresponding look in hers. Much as George Manners admired her, it was impossible for him not to notice the great alteration in her appearance. Her face had grown absolutely thin, and lines of care and anxiety were only too visible even to his partial eyes.

He looked at her again and again, as she was

bending over his stepmother, giving her arrow-root, and arranging her pillows. The excitement of the night before, which had lent a temporary flush to her face, was gone ; and the paleness of her cheeks, and the deep violet hue under her large soft eyes, struck him with a vague sensation of terror and alarm.

"I am anxious about you, child," he said to her a little later, when she came downstairs to wish him good-night. "What have you been doing with yourself to get so thin?" and he got up from the easy-chair where he was sitting, and knocked out the ashes from his pipe as he spoke.

"Oh, I am very well, George," she answered, with a smile.

"Are you? Well, then, you don't look very well, that's all I can tell you. What are you fretting about, Amy?" and he put his arm round her.

"Nothing, sir, nothing."

"Tell me, child," said George, fondly; "if I've been rough to you, I didn't mean it; it was only out of love, you know," he added. "But don't let anything I said vex you any more; and, Amy—we may as well fix it now—you are going to marry me, aren't you?"

"No, no."

"Nonsense, child; I can't part with you now."

"I thought I was too bad," said she, with a painful attempt at a joke, for her eyes were really fast filling with tears.

"I daresay you are, little woman; but bad or good, I must have you now."

Amy was silent.

"Don't fret yourself any more," went on George.

"Let bygones be bygones; you love me, you say?"

"Yes."

"Then it's all right. I'm only a poor man though, Amy; you'll have to leave off all these fine things," and he laid his hand caressingly on her sleeve.

"Oh! George, don't talk like that—don't talk like that."

"But I must," said George, gravely. "I want you to understand that I cannot, in honour, spend even half the small income that I make. I am indebted to my father three thousand pounds, and till I've paid this in full we will have to live on very little—not more, Miss Amy, than two hundred and fifty, perhaps, a year. Can you do that, do you think?"

She only sighed in reply to this question.

"It is very little, certainly," said George, in an annoyed voice; "but I'm bound in honour to think of my sisters' fortunes first."

"What?" said Amy, looking up, as if she had not been attending to him, "what are you saying?"

"I am saying," said George, in an exceedingly cross tone, and drawing himself up, "that I cannot afford to spend more than two hundred and fifty pounds a year. If that is too little——"

"Oh! George," said Amy, tenderly, "don't talk about money. My dear, with you——"

"Well?" said George, mollified, and stealing his arm again round her waist.

"I wouldn't care how little—I wouldn't care how poor we were, if we might never part."

"Well, we wont, child. Why, aren't you satisfied? There, lean your head there—so you can live on very little, can you?"

"Yes, of course."

"There's no of course about it," said George, practically; "we'll have to pinch and screw, and live as plainly as two people can; but if we are together that wont seem hard to me; but that three thousand pounds I must——"

"What three thousand pounds? I do not quite understand."

"What a stupid little thing you are! I've been telling you of it this half-hour. Well, Miss Amy, you must know, for the hundredth and fiftieth time, that when I was at college I behaved like a fool. I had been brought up with Walter and Hugh

Manners," and George winced a little as he mentioned his cousin's name and stopped.

"Well?"

"Well, they were a rich man's sons, and, I a poor one's; yet I never remembered the little fact till it was too late. I got into debt and difficulties, and would have been arrested, I verily believe, if that good woman upstairs had not persuaded my father to lend me four thousand pounds which he had laid by for the little girls; and I swore to myself, if I lived seven or eight years, I would repay it. It is five years ago now, and I have paid back one thousand; but this year, please God—in a month, in fact—I will pay another. But still, you see, there'll be two thousand to pay; and then we'll want some furniture—I wonder how much that will cost?"

"I tell you what, George—you say you owe—you will owe—two thousand pounds still," said Amy, eagerly. "Well then, George dear, listen to me; don't let us talk of furniture or anything else till that is all paid. Never mind how long we wait. Your mother will let me stay on here, and I will see you sometimes, and you won't be hampered with debt. Isn't that far the best plan, now?"

"I—I don't see it; but I suppose you are afraid of such a small income?"

"No, no; why do you say that? As if a woman, who really likes any one, cares for fine dresses, or houses, or anything else—except to look smart to *him*," she added, with a loving, little smile.

"My darling——" said George Manners; but she got her own way. They were to wait—to wait years, she said. "And who knows what may happen before then?" she continued, as if hopefully; and when she came down to breakfast next morning, George thought she was looking much better, much less careworn and sad.

"I am going to take you for a walk to-day," he said; "I mean to have a little pink paint on your white face before I leave Narbrough."

"Then let us go to see poor Katie?"

"And who may poor Katie be, child?"

When Amy told this young girl's sad story to her lover, George, with ready sympathy, promised to accompany her.

"Has she finished your wine yet, I wonder?" he said. "Suppose I get the cellar key, and steal a bottle of the governor's best port and put it into my coat-pocket."

"What a child you are, George."

"Don't be impertinent, my dear. I'm past thirty, and that sounds satirical."

They went in the afternoon—a pale, cold, spring

afternoon—over the wet links, and down to the hard, dry sand.

“ You remember the day we first walked here ? ” said George.

“ Yes.”

“ We wont talk of the past any more, but of what’s to come,” he went on, cheerfully. “ I’m not always in a bad humour, Amy—I’m not to-day.”

“ Well, I’m very glad.”

“ When you’re Mrs. George, mind you don’t answer me when I come home either cross or out of sorts—it only makes me more disagreeable.”

“ A pleasant prospect.”

“ Yes, and I’ll do likewise ; when your maid-of-all-work breaks your best china, and you fly into a passion, I wont speak—I really wont.”

“ Are you quite sure ? ”

“ Yes, I’ll forgive you everything, except——”

“ Well, except what ? ”

“ I shall be jealous—I can’t help it—I know I shall.”

“ Oh ! don’t say so—you frighten me.”

George looked grave.

“ Why should it frighten you ? ” he said. “ What good woman need fear her husband being a jealous man ; she should have nothing to hide.”

“ Yes, I know ; but——”

“ Amy, I’ll cut your throat, I warn you, mind,”

said George, between jest and earnest, "if I ever find out that you have."

They found poor Katie a little weaker, a little thinner, that was all. "She is wonderful, hinny," said old Alsie, in answer to their inquiries at the door. "And so you've come to see her, Mr. George; ah, hinny, I mind ye well."

"Many a ride I've had in your creel, Alsie," said George.

"Ay—you war a bonny black-eyed bairn—bolder than the other; but they were fine childer, too."

"And you've carried it all these years?" said George, looking curiously at the old woman's wrinkled face.

"Ay—I'd my man then, Mr. George, and my bairns; they've all left me now."

"There have been many changes since then."

"For all maybe, but old folk forget they mun' look to see them."

"Yours has been an industrious life, Alsie."

"I was born to't; I've niver found it hard till late."

"And you do now?"

"At times, hinny, ay—my old bones seem like to break; but when the Lord's time comes I'll get rest."

Meanwhile Amy Williams had been talking to the dying girl in the inner room.

"So you've brought Mr. George?" she said; "I hear his voice."

"Yes, you wanted to see him, you know," replied Miss Williams.

"Ay," said the girl, eagerly, her pale face flushing painfully; "I want to see if he's a look o' Jim."

But when George came in to speak to her, poor Katie was evidently disappointed. Amy Williams could not help smiling at her dissatisfied expression, which, however, soon passed away when he spoke a few kindly words to her, for George Manners never saw the suffering of any human being unmoved. There was about him indeed that true sympathy—that echo, as it were, of the feelings of others—which unconsciously endears us to the possessor; and when he stretched out his strong, firm hand to the old fisher woman to say good-bye, she blessed him with the full and pious belief that the blessings of the old would be fulfilled, and that the Lord whom she had served so faithfully during her long and dreary pilgrimage would not let her words fall to the ground.

"He's not so bonny as Jim," whispered the girl to Amy, as he turned away; "his cheeks are thinner and paler—but he's a smile like his." It was her highest form of praise. Who to her mind still was like the poor lad yet tossing in the restless sea?

"That old woman might teach us humility," said George, gravely, as they quietly walked home. "What a life! yet how content and thankful she is. Little Amy, when you and I get rich, we must not forget our poorer neighbours."

"No, George."

"And there's something, child, I have to give you. I bought this ring for you awhile ago—take it now."

"When did you buy it, George?"

"Never mind, don't ask questions; and as presents are the order of the day, give this to old Alsie, with my love, the first time you see her;" and he put a sovereign into Amy's hand.

"The beginning of economy, sir," said she, with a smile.

"You see, I've known her all my life," answered George, apologetically; "poor old creature, it will buy her some whisky."

He left the next morning—left happy, excited, and trustful; sure that his Amy loved him, and with his warm heart beating strong in faith and hope. Yet so strange is human nature—so changeable, so wayward, that before he had travelled his sixty miles—before he reached Oldcastle, that horrible "green-eyed monster," jealousy, which seems ever the dark shadow of the fondest love, stole back again into his heart; and with doubt

and pain, which he in vain tried to struggle against, he remembered that Sir Hugh was near his love, while he was not ; and that the secret of their old acquaintance was yet unexplained and unknown.

All the next day he tormented himself with these, to him, intolerable fears ; and on the Friday morning, so overwhelming grew his feelings that he determined to return to Narbrough, if only for a few hours, as he was obliged to be at his office again on Saturday morning ; he having, when he left home, promised to be back by the last train on that evening.

On Friday, however, he persuaded himself that for the afternoon at least he might take a holiday ; and as there was a fast train about the middle of the day, he started like an unwise man that he was ; for how seldom is it that any one who arrives before their expected time is entirely welcome.

George Manners reached Narbrough station about four o'clock, and was walking quickly homewards, when, at the end of the lane which leads from the highway to the Vicarage, he encountered his cousin Sir Hugh.

Sir Hugh was riding leisurely along, and he checked his horse when he saw George approaching.

" Well, George, where have you sprung from ?" he said.

"I have come down in the express," replied George.

"Ah! well, how's the price of tallow, iron, &c.?"

"Bad, as usual," answered George, with a grim smile.

"Going to stay long?"

"Only a few hours—I must leave to-night."

"By Jove! how much a week do you spend on trains just now, George, if it is not an impertinent question?"

"I am anxious, you see, about——"

"Your mamma! Good boy. Mamma, I hear, is improving fast."

"You need not be quite so boorish, Hugh," said George, colouring.

"No; what do you want, my fine fellow?"

This question was addressed by Sir Hugh to a ragged fisher boy, who had come up the moment before, and who was standing staring intently at the two gentlemen.

"Please, sir, be you Sir Hugh?" said the small child, lifting up his brown face and white curly head with an inquiring expression.

"Yes, my lad, I be Sir Hugh!"

"Wull then, I'd to guv' you this," said the boy, producing from the pocket of a pair of short, baggy trousers a note much soiled by its visit to this receptacle; "it's from the young lady

that's down at the Vicarage—the governess ; and she said——”

“ Deuce take you, what matter !” said Sir Hugh, glancing at George.

“ But she said I wasn't to show it to any one but y'rsell.”

Sir Hugh was sorry for George—truly sorry at this minute—for the colour faded out of his face, and his lips trembled in spite of his efforts to appear calm.

“ Ah ! I see,” said Sir Hugh, carelessly opening the note and glancing at its contents. “ Mrs. Manners wants some books, and Miss Williams has written for what she wants to be sent down. I'll send them some time to-morrow ; and, my lad, here's a shilling for you, and he off. George, as all fear of infection must now be over, come up and dine with us to-day, like a good fellow ; the girls will be delighted to see you.”

“ I cannot come,” said George, hoarsely ; “ good morning,” and without another word he turned and left his cousin, who looked after him for a moment, and then, beginning to whistle, went also on his way.





CHAPTER XVI.

A NEW FRIEND.

I WILL never see her again!" said George, in the bitterness of his heart, as he walked on after leaving Sir Hugh, scarcely knowing whither he went. "I will never speak to her more!"

"George, my dear fellow—George," cried a voice from behind him; and when he stopped and looked back he saw the portly form of his father hurrying to overtake him.

"My dear George," said the Vicar, breathlessly, pausing, and wiping his red face, as soon as he came up, "I'm so glad I saw you; I was just off for the doctor as fast as I could go, for that fool James was out of the way as usual when he was wanted, confound him!"

"For the doctor?"

"Yes, indeed. That poor girl, Miss Williams, has just been brought home in a terrible state."

"What!" said George, and his face grew

so pale that the Vicar charitably added, quickly enough—

“Yes, yes—only a fainting fit, though; nothing of consequence, I hope. But it seems some poor creature in the village, whom she was in the habit of visiting, broke a bloodvessel about an hour ago, and died—literally died in her arms. Poor Miss Williams was in such a state, for there was no one else in the house at the time; and I was quite shocked, really quite shocked, when I saw her brought home by two women all covered with blood; but, luckily, it wasn’t her own.”

“Is she better now?” asked George, quickly.

“She was coming round, I hope, when I left her,” said the Vicar; “but we better have Ruthyen; it will be more satisfactory to have Ruthyen, for the servants are frightened, and are running about doing nothing, as women always do, if there is anything to be done; and as your mother cannot be disturbed, we’d best have the doctor; and, George, my dear fellow, your legs are younger than mine, would you mind going for him?”

“No, I will go at once,” said George; and with a hasty nod to his father he immediately commenced walking towards Dr. Ruthyen’s house.

He scarcely thought of Sir Hugh again as he went. Fear, anxiety, and a dull sense of pain was now all that he felt; and when at last, almost

breathless with hurrying, he arrived at the doctor's little, whitewashed residence, which stood perched in a small, neat garden close to the highway, he had to rap and ring furiously for at least five minutes before the door was opened by a fair, freckled, red-haired, young Scotchwoman, who was the doctor's wife.

"Lor, Mr. George, is that you?" she said.
"Why, what's the matter?"

"Is the doctor in?" said George, touching his hat, even impatiently.

"Well, then, he's just not. He's gone to Laywiche, poor man, for he wanted some clothes. I've been telling him ever so long he must go; but then he was always waiting for Mrs. Bradshaw. However, he's got to-day. But who's ill at the Vicarage?—not Mrs. Manners, poor woman, any worse, I hope?"

"No, no—my mother I daresay is pretty well. It's Miss Williams."

"Dear me! has she taken the fever? Thomas said he wouldn't wonder if she did—and she doesn't look a strong constitution. I wish it mayn't go very hard with her."

"When will Dr. Ruthyen be back?" said George, in a fury.

"Why, now, that's just what I can't tell you. You see he had a vast o' things to get—hosiery and

the like. His stockings were really quite worn out, that's the truth; and then the drugs, and his bit of dinner. I shouldn't wonder if it was night before he gets home. There's a train from the North at nine; he'll be coming by that, I daresay. But there's the young man, Mr. George, in the surgery, you know—a very clever young man, and a cousin of my own; and the doctor often sends him to visit the patients."

"Is he in?"

"Why, no, not now; but he'll be back to his tea. He's going the rounds for the doctor, but as soon as ever he comes in I'll send him."

"Very well," answered George. "Good morning, Mrs. Ruthyen," and he walked very quickly out of the doctor's little garden. He had made up his mind to go to the Vicarage, and if he found Miss Williams no better to telegraph at once to Old-castle for a doctor.

When he reached home he could see no one in the lower storey, so he went upstairs, and found the whole household standing in Miss Williams's bedroom, and at least five women crowding round her bed.

"Good heavens! what are you all doing here?" he cried at the open door.

"Oh! it's Mr. George," said Mrs. Morrison, the old man-servant's wife, turning round. "Have you got the doctor, sir? The Vicar said you had gone for him. You see, James is away at Lilbourne after

some spring cabbages ; that's how he wasn't handy to go. Ay, she's mortal bad, poor thing," she continued, stepping aside so as to allow George to see Miss Williams's head, which was lying on the cook's fat, red arm, who was bending completely over her.

"Do you know it is enough to kill her, you holding her like that?" said George, now entering the room, the atmosphere of which was strongly impregnated with a smell of burnt feathers and peppermint water. "Ellen, take away your arm, and don't lean over the bed ; and Mrs. Morrison, and you too," turning to the other women, "better leave the room. It is suffocating here—how can she get any air? And, Jane, open the window and bring me some water."

The women looked at each other and smiled, and then obeyed "Mr. George's" orders. It was well known in the household, and frequently discussed, that the governess and Mr. George were "sweet-hearts," and so the cook and Mrs. Morrison, after exchanging glances, withdrew, and the other two women followed their example.

"Jane, you come back at once with the water," said George to the housemaid, for he had seen this little byplay of the eyes ; and then, when they were gone, he went up and stood beside the bed where Amy Williams, with closed eyes and a white and violet-tinted face, lay insensible and cold, only

showing she was alive by a faint convulsive shivering, which at times ran through her frame.

"Amy," said George, "Amy!" and he took her hand, all his jealousy and anger swept away at the sight of her white face. "Amy, my dear, don't you know me?"

But she made no sign, and with a kind of shuddering horror George glanced at her dress, which was stained, and positively wet in parts, with the poor dead girl's blood.

"Jane, can't you change this?" he asked of the housemaid when she returned, pointing to the outer jacket.

"Oh yes, Mr. George," she answered, and she was a neat-handed, smiling girl; "but they all came about and flustered one so, I didn't know what I was doing; but if you'll hold her up I'll soon put it all right."

George bent down and lifted Amy up in his arms, laying her head against his breast, while Jane pulled off the stained white jacket and skirt which she wore.

"There, that will do," he said; "now give me the water," and he held it to her lips, and made Jane chafe her cold hands and sprinkle her face; and in a minute or two Amy Williams gave a deep-drawn sigh.

"She's coming to," said Jane, and involuntarily

George drew her closer to him as the girl spoke.

"I think if her head were down it would be better," went on Jane; and with a sigh George acknowledged the truth of what she said, and laid it gently down upon the bed—feeling as if part of himself were being torn from him as he did so.

In another second Amy opened her eyes, and seeing George near her made a feeble effort to put her hand in his.

"You are better now?" he said.

"Yes:" and she gave another long, shuddering sigh, and closed her eyes, and tears gathered under the lids and wet the brown eyelashes, and then slowly rolled—one after the other—down her pale cheeks.

"Do not agitate yourself," said George, holding her hand tightly in his own trembling one.

"No," and she moved his hand, so that it lay against her wet face; "no, George." And Jane, the housemaid, being young, and having a lover of her own, felt at this moment that perhaps she might be in the way.

"I'll just go down and heat the poker, Mr. George, for the fire," she said, briskly. "I think the room's damp;" and catching up a stray glass and a cup and saucer as she spoke, she went out of the room, closing the door behind her, and left

George standing by Miss Williams, with her face resting against his hand.

He had sworn that afternoon he would never speak to her again—sworn she was utterly false and unworthy ; yet when he saw her lying there, so fair, so loving, and so ill, he knelt down and kissed her—passionately kissed her, though even as he did so the memory of Hugh Manners returned with hateful distinctness to his mind.

“ Why do you make such a fool of me ? ” he said, rising abruptly and speaking under his breath ; “ why do you make me mad ? ”

“ Oh ! George,” she answered, and she covered her face with his hand which she still held as she spoke. “ Oh ! George, you should not—you must not—we must not love each other any more.”

“ What is the matter ? ”

“ It is wrong,” cried Amy Williams, “ wrong—wrong of me. Oh ! George, you don’t know—and poor Katie’s death ; oh ! George, I dare not die—I dare not die, if I let you love me like this ! ”

“ What do you mean ? ” said George, sternly.

“ Oh ! oh ! I am so unhappy—so miserable,” she sobbed. “ Oh ! George, I love you far, far too well. What shall we do ? What shall I do ? ”

“ Hush, hush,” said George Manners, for he saw she was becoming violently hysterical. “ Hush, Amy.”

"But you wont leave me—you wont leave me, whatever I tell you! Oh! George, why did we ever meet—why did I ever see you?"

"Why, indeed," said George, almost with a groan.

"But you will always love me now?" said Amy, "always—always."

"Hush, I beg you to hush," said George, opening the door and calling for Jane.

"Jane, stay with her," he said, as the housemaid reappeared, "it seems to agitate her me being here;" and then just as George was walking downstairs the doctor's young man came walking up, and George felt half angry as he passed the young Scotchman, because he was going to have the privilege of looking at her face and feeling her pulse.

The Vicar went to speak to the doctor's assistant after he had seen the patient, and was putting on his hat preparatory to his departure in the hall.

"Well, sir, how is the lady?" he said.

"She, ah—she——" and the Scotch youth blushed up to the roots of his red hair; "she—ah."

"Well, doctor?" said the Vicar, mildly.

"She, ah—nervous—hysterical, must be kept perfectly quiet—on no account disturbed," stammered out the poor lad, blushing more violently than ever; and the Vicar having delivered this medical opinion to his son, George decided it were best that he should not see her again.

He went up and sat by Mrs. Manners, who was better, but anxious about Miss Williams, of whom she spoke with the greatest affection ; evidently regarding her as his future wife, and George groaned in spirit as he listened.

A note came from Adelaide for him before he left home, urging him to come up and see them at the Hall, and praising Sir Hugh's kindness and hospitality in no measured terms.

"You really ought to come up and thank him, dear George," she wrote ; "you cannot think how good he is to us all ;" and somehow this note gave George a certain relief, as he felt Adelaide would scarcely have written it if she had been angry with her cousin. Yet why had Amy spoken as she had done ? Why had her conscience apparently been awakened by the sight of the poor fisher girl's sudden death ? But she was not herself, he consoled himself with thinking. She scarcely knew what she was saying ; yet—yet—oh ! horrible doubt—the same old doubt, ever haunting him and tormenting him—for is there any suffering worse than to suspect one that we truly love ?

George got into the train at Narbrough station, on his way back to Oldcastle, with these thoughts for his company, and they travelled with him we may be sure to the next station, when the door of the carriage which he occupied was opened

by the guard, and a young lady got in beside him.

At this apparition (though her appearance was very agreeable) George immediately plunged into his topcoat-pocket and brought out a daily paper, which he had bought before starting to amuse himself during his journey, but which till this moment he had never thought of opening ; but the young lady only looked at him very quietly, and began arranging her parcels, of which she had about a dozen, on the seat opposite her.

There was one, a child's leather painted ball, which would roll out of its paper with the motion of the train, and finally rolled on the floor of the carriage and under the feet of Mr. George Mannors, who was still attentively studying his newspaper.

When this accident happened George had little choice left him. A gentleman cannot go hunting for a ball, and present it back to a very pretty, smiling, young lady, without some sort of agreeable acknowledgment of her presence ; and George, though he was exceedingly unhappy, jealous, and anxious, found it impossible to do so ; and the young lady replied so simply, yet so pleasantly that he put his paper on the vacant seat by his side and began talking to her—a proceeding to which she had apparently no objection.

"I see you do not remember me?" she said, with a smile, after a few minutes' conversation on the weather and the time the train would take to reach Oldcastle.

"No, certainly I do not," said George.

"I was introduced to you once at the races—last year, at the races—by my brother-in-law, Mr. Mounsey," said the young lady.

"I know Mr. Mounsey very well," replied George. "I frequently meet him in business; and—yes, ah! now I do remember, he was with two ladies. Your carriage was near the Stand, but I am ashamed to say I had forgotten the circumstance till you reminded me of it."

"I remember you through the dust," said the young lady, laughing; "and through you not being able to take off your hat for the wind. But you need not apologize for not knowing me again, for I should not have known you if I had never seen you before then; but I knew you by sight, for Mr. Mounsey had pointed you out to me in the streets—sometimes when we were driving."

"I am very happy, I am sure, to renew your acquaintance," said George, bowing politely; "but you still have the advantage of me; as——"

"You mean you do not know my name? I am Miss Clayton—Miss Laura Clayton; and I live with my sister, Mrs. Mounsey, in Windsor Street."

George bowed again. "I hope Mr. and Mrs. Mounsey are well?" he said.

"Oh yes," answered Miss Clayton, with a little laugh; and then she began in her pleasant, cheerful voice to talk about the different objects of interest in the town; and so agreeable was her manner, that when they arrived at Oldcastle George was astonished to have found the journey so short.

"I will see after your luggage," he said, as they entered the station; "and shall I get you a cab?"

"Oh, Mr. Mounsey will be waiting for me, I expect," said Miss Clayton. "Ah, there he is;" and she put her head out of the carriage, and nodded to a stout, high-nosed man of fifty, who was standing on the platform, apparently looking out for her.

"Ah! Laura," said he, in a lively tone, as soon as he saw her coming forward, and holding out two fat fingers for her to shake; "and so you've arrived—and Mr. Manners, I see. Mr. Manners, how are you, sir? It is some time since I have had the pleasure of seeing you—I hope you're well?"

"Thanks, pretty well," said George.

"And Laura—of course you know my sister-in-law, Miss Laura Clayton, Mr. Manners? I hope, Laura, you left our good friends—the Gibsons—well? The Gibsons of Mountwell, Mr. Manners

—a most excellent and worthy man ; made his own fortune, sir ; built himself, I may say ; ha ! ha ! ha ! for he was originally a builder—do you take ? Your father will know him well, Mr. Manners. How is the worthy Vicar ?”—and Mr. Mounsey waved his hand, and then assisted his sister-in-law out of the carriage.

“ As I leave you in such good hands, I will say good evening,” said George, taking off his hat, with a smile to Miss Clayton.

“ Good-bye,” said she, frankly holding out her hand ; “ I hope, Mr. Manners, we shall meet again.”

“ I shall be most happy,” replied George.

“ I am sure mamma will be delighted to see Mr. Manners, if he will call at Windsor Street any time,” said Mr. Mounsey, with another wave of his fat hand. “ No. 15, Windsor Street, Mr. Manners ; pleasantly-situated houses, sir ; the pleasantest in the north end of the town, I think ; and the north end is *the* end now—ha ! ha ! ha !”

“ Thank you very much,” said George, and bowing once more to his new acquaintances he walked out of the station, and went straight to his quiet lodgings, in the north part of the town also, where he spent a restless and unhappy night ; only falling into a fitful sleep, as the dim, pale morning light began to break through the smoke and haze of the sleeping town.

All the next day he was busily immersed in business. It happened to be a time of peculiar depression in trade, and George found plenty of other causes for anxiety besides the private ones which were weighing on his mind. But this did him good; it roused his energies, and braced his nerves, and he was not sorry to find that it would be almost impossible for him to pay another visit to Narbrough on the Saturday night, as he had originally intended. He wrote, therefore, to inform Mrs. Manners of this, and added—"Tell Miss Williams I trust she will take care of herself, and that she will be quite well when I come down, which, however, may not be until the end of next week."

In the meantime, at Narbrough, Amy Williams was slowly recovering from the shock which poor Katie's sudden and awful death had given her.

She had gone down to the village, as she had very often done lately, on the Friday afternoon, intending to sit with the poor invalid while her grandmother was out, and had found her apparently much as usual, when suddenly she cried—"Raise me up, miss, raise me up;" and as Miss Williams put her arms round her to comply with this request, she was deluged with the poor girl's life-blood, who, after a few brief struggles, or rather sighs, died in

her arms, though for many minutes afterwards Miss Williams was unaware that she was gone. Naturally this had been a very great shock to her, and when Dr. Ruthyen saw her in the evening he confirmed his "young man's" advice, and went into the study himself to impress on the Vicar that she must be kept perfectly quiet.

"She has a delicate constitution, sir," said the doctor, "and it has been greatly tried, or I'm much mistaken, and I won't answer for the consequences if she is disturbed."

"But who is going to disturb her, doctor?" said the Vicar, rather sharply.

"She's altered since she came here," said Dr. Ruthyen. "Look after her, sir; she's a delicate girl—just a girl to go off in a consumption, with any nonsense or other;" and after giving this hint the doctor went away.

"Is there anything real? I don't mean folly, you know, but anything serious, Nelly, between George and Miss Williams?" asked the Vicar of his wife an hour later.

"Well yes, dear, I think there is," she answered.

Mrs. Manners was sitting up for the first time that night—looking very pale and worn, but a pretty woman still, and the Vicar was standing beside her when he made this inquiry, feeling really glad to see her better, for he had greatly missed

her good management and attentions during her illness.

"What is it, then ; are they engaged?" he went on, "for that ass, Ruthyen, has been hinting downstairs as if he thought she had something on her mind. George isn't trifling with the poor girl, I hope?"

"No, Arthur dear, no ; but they quarrel sometimes—I don't know—but I hope it's all right now."

"It's a fine match, I must say," grumbled the Vicar ; "a penniless girl we know nothing about."

"You married me, dear," said Mrs. Manners, meekly but fondly, and the Vicar actually bent down and gave her a kiss.

"You are a good woman, Nelly, though you're a little goose," he said. "You have made a fine market for your paragon, at any rate ; well, George must look to himself. The girls won't see much of their money now, I fear."

"Oh ! Arthur, you don't know George. He wouldn't touch that money for all the love in the world. He's going to pay you another thousand this next week—he told me so to-day, and they don't talk of being married for years, I believe."

"So much the wiser—so much the wiser. Well, then, does Adelaide know of this precious engagement?"

"I don't know that they are quite engaged ; but George wants her—I know that—yes, I am sure of that."

"And isn't she satisfied with George ? Perhaps she's after Hugh. By Jove ! I shouldn't wonder ; women are capable of anything."

"Don't say that," said Mrs. Manners, with a certain uneasiness in her tone.

"By Jove ! that would be too good," laughed the Vicar, "too good. I'd better give Adelaide a hint. I wonder what she will say."





CHAPTER XVII.

A LETTER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

THE Vicar was rather confirmed in this idea the next morning, for as he was standing at the stable-door inspecting old James rubbing down his horse, one of the grooms from the Hall rode into the yard and produced a note.

"Is that from my daughter?" asked the Vicar.

"No, sir," answered the man, touching his hat; "it's for the young lady here—Sir Hugh gave it to me;" and the Vicar, taking it in his hand with some curiosity, saw it was addressed in his nephew's handwriting to Miss Williams.

"Give it to one of the maids," he said, carelessly, handing it back; and then thrusting his hands into his pockets he strolled out of the stable-yard.

He felt anything but pleased as he did so. In spite of his own dislike to Sir Hugh, and his constant squabbles with his daughter, he was yet by no means without both pride and ambition on her account, and somehow he had frequently thought

of and speculated on her marriage with her cousin.

There were many things, of course, to lead him to this supposition: their long intimacy and early affection, and Adelaide's undisguised preference, all tended to the idea, and therefore he felt some indignation on finding his governess carrying on any sort of correspondence with the man he had, perhaps half-unconsciously, fixed on for his son-in-law; and so strongly did this incident affect him, that during the afternoon he informed his wife that he intended to walk up to the Hall.

"For it is high time that they were all home again," he added. "I don't care for them intruding on Hugh a moment longer than is necessary, and any danger of infection must now be over."

"It's only three weeks, Arthur," said Mrs. Manners, nervously.

"There's no fear—I asked Ruthyen this morning. My dear, do not begin crying again; I know nothing so tiresome."

"I was thinking of our darling," wept poor Mrs. Manners.

"Hush, hush!—nonsense! Don't let us have any more sickness or scenes, for goodness's sake, for some time. You've seen Miss Williams, I suppose, this morning—how is she?"

"Very much shaken and altered. I am beginning to be uneasy about her, Arthur—and you frightened me last night, too—she looks so worn and anxious."

"What the deuce did you ever get a pretty governess for, Nelly?" said the Vicar, impatiently. "She's brought nothing but rows into the house since she came, I think."

"Adelaide is so foolish about her."

"Perhaps she has some reason," answered the Vicar, significantly; and then he set out on his walk to the Hall.

He found Adelaide and the children alone. "Hugh was out riding," Miss Manners explained; and after a few minutes' conversation the Vicar said—

"Now, my dears, I want to talk to your sister;" and thus dismissed the three younger ones.

"I think, Adelaide," began the Vicar, as soon as they were alone, "that it is quite time you were thinking of coming home."

"But the infection! Oh! papa, it is too soon—a month would be too soon! I really dare not come yet, and Hugh says we are quite welcome to stay as long as we like—indeed, he likes us to be here."

"Hugh is very polite, I'm sure," said the Vicar; "but for all that, I think you have been here long

enough. Don't stay too long *anywhere*, Adelaide. A man can't well turn you out of his house, you know."

"Hugh has no wish."

"Very likely not; but take my advice, and leave him before he's tired of you."

Adelaide sighed.

"I don't much like saying what I am going to say," went on the Vicar, half nervously, "but, Adelaide, is there anything between you and your cousin?—I mean love-making; you know what I mean, I suppose, my dear?"

"Papa!"

"I wouldn't ask you if I hadn't a reason. I don't interfere, as you know, much with your affairs, or any one else's, for that matter; but if Hugh is anything to you, I would advise you to look a little sharper after him, that's all."

"What do you mean, papa?" and Adelaide turned pale.

"I mean he carries on some sort of correspondence, at any rate, with Miss Williams."

"It cannot be!" said Adelaide, much agitated—"it cannot be, papa; tell me what makes you think so—tell me, for Heaven's sake!"

"Simply, he sent a groom down this morning with a letter for her."

"Is this true?—is this possibly true?" said Adelaide, rising and pacing the room in a perfect

storm of indignant anger. "And you don't turn her out of the house, papa; you don't turn her into the streets—vile woman that she must be!"

"That is too strong language, Adelaide."

"What is too strong for a creature like that?—a creature who first entangles George, and then throws him over, and tries for Hugh! Papa, surely, surely you will listen to me. Let George find her gone when he comes back; pay her her wages, and send her away at once—to-day. Oh, papa! don't refuse me this."

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Adelaide," said the Vicar, pettishly; "you forget that this young lady, or whatever she is, nursed your poor little sister, and your mother, when you did not; and, by Jove, I'm not going to turn her out, without a roof to her head, after that, to please you or any one else."

"It's what I expected," said Adelaide, bitterly. "What am I to a stranger?"

"It's your own doing; but I'm not unreasonable. I don't wonder at you not liking to have her at home; and I don't see that there is anything to prevent us sending her away decently—I mean giving her proper notice, and time to find another situation, and that sort of thing."

"She will not have to go far for friends, it seems," sneered Adelaide.

"If you talk and act like a fool I'm done with you. I came to you as a friend, I give you my advice; and, as far as I can, I will assist you; but have you not the sense to see that treating her as you would treat her, is the most likely way to send Hugh to her arms."

"There is nothing between them; nothing but folly," replied Adelaide, doggedly. "He's often told me he thought she was in love with George."

"There's such a thing as throwing dust in one's neighbour's eyes, Adelaide."

"Papa, you are odious."

"Very well, my dear," said the Vicar, shrugging his shoulders. "I've done my duty; I've warned you, and you can, of course, now act as you please. About the children, however, I will decide. This is Saturday, and on Tuesday afternoon I will send for them; and, in the meantime, will write to Hugh to thank him for his hospitality, and inform him that I wish them to leave. And now I am going to have a chat with them, so I wish you good day;" saying which the Vicar took up his hat, and left the room; leaving his eldest daughter furiously jealous and indignant, yet scarcely knowing how to act in her anger.

An hour later, just before she was going upstairs to dress for dinner, a circumstance occurred which decided her. She was sitting in the library, wait-

ing with a kind of feverish impatience for her cousin's return ; scarcely knowing how she would receive him, or what she would say to him ; doubtful whether she should reproach him, yet conscious that she had no real grounds for her jealousy to rest on ; for Sir Hugh had never, certainly, in his long intimacy and intercourse with her, gone beyond mere gallantry or cousinly affection—when the door opened, and a servant looked in.

“ I beg your pardon, miss,” said the man, half retreating ; “ but I did not know any one was here, and I was just going to leave this on the table for Sir Hugh ; it's a letter from the Vicarage.”

“ You can lay it down ; I expect him every minute,” answered Adelaide, beginning to tremble violently, for in a moment she guessed who it would be from.

She only waited till the servant had left the room, and then rose and took up her cousin's letter. She had no need to look at it twice. She knew the fine clear handwriting of its address by sight, and saw at once it was from Miss Williams, and a strong and violent temptation rushed into her mind as she saw it. Why should she not now solve this mystery ? Why should she not learn the tie which bound Hugh Manners to this woman ? For George's sake, whispered a lying spirit—for

Hugh's; and she yielded, and slipping the letter into her dress pocket, ran hurriedly upstairs.

It was not sealed, and a small kettle with hot water in it, was standing on the wide old-fashioned hearth in her bedroom.

She hesitated a moment. She had been born a lady, and something seemed even then to restrain her eager trembling hands. But the refinements of birth and education were powerless against the fierce instincts of jealousy and passion, and the next she had put the kettle on the blazing fire, and was holding her cousin's letter to the steam.

Her face flushed painfully, with shame it might be, as the envelope opened, and when with her shaking hands she drew out its enclosure. This contained not many words, but these to her seemed written in fire—seemed to scorch her brain as she read them—and with a sort of cry she flung the note passionately on the floor; looking down at it there at the clear finely written words, with the fiercest indignation depicted on her face.

“I could not come this morning,” she read, “though I wish to see you so much, for I was very ill yesterday—*really very ill*; and to-morrow (Sunday), as you suppose, G. M. will probably be at home, and of course I wish him to know nothing of this. I will trust to your honour that it

is so, and I am sure when you know all you will not deceive me. Will you, therefore, come on *Monday afternoon* about four o'clock, and meet me on the sands, just beneath the links, and near the end of the first opening across them?

"Yours,

"Saturday."

"A. W."

The first dinner-bell rang before Adelaide Manners picked up this note, which she considered as most convincing evidence of her cousin's guilt. That he—he whom she had meant to marry—whom at least she truly loved—should thus deceive her—should lie to her—pretend it was George. Oh! it was very bitter—bitterer than gall; and Adelaide scarcely thought of her own conduct in opening Sir Hugh's letter, under the overpowering influence of this cruel discovery.

At last slowly, and as if almost unwillingly, she picked up the note, and restored it to its envelope, and again fastened it down; and then, with a burning spot of scarlet on each cheek, she descended to the library, without having attempted to change her dress or make the slightest difference in her appearance.

"Oh! you know then?" said Dolly to her as she entered, after glancing satirically for a moment at her plain morning dress; for Adelaide usually,

since they had been at the Hall, had made a very elaborate toilet for her cousin's benefit.

"What do I know?" she answered.

"That Hugh isn't coming to dinner."

"No; who told you?" asked Adelaide, eagerly.

"He sent a message—he won't be back till late. He has met with a friend."

"Ay."

"I thought you knew, as you hadn't dressed," added Dolly, impertinently. But Adelaide made her no answer, sitting down to dinner with a sort of moan, and scarcely touching, or attempting to touch, the delicacies, which Sir Hugh had daily served up at his table. Then, when dinner was over, she rose hastily, leaving the three girls to laugh over her extraordinary conduct, and to conclude, at Dolly's suggestion, "that Hugh and Adelaide had had some row;" but utterly careless of their comments, she proceeded to her own room, and there at once wrote a few impressive lines to George at Oldcastle.

"Dear George," she wrote, "papa told me this morning that Mrs. Manners had heard from you, and that you said you thought you could scarcely find time to come down to Narbrough to-night, or on Sunday. George, I implore you, for the sake of our dead mother, *not* to come, but to come on *Monday*, in the afternoon train, which arrives at

Narbrough Station about four, and I will meet you there; for I have made a discovery so shameful to us both, that it is right you should be convinced with your own eyes of the treachery of a person—of two persons, in one of whom at least I also trusted too well. I will say no more, but will expect you. Come at any cost, and do not refuse your only sister's earnest request.

“ A. MANNERS.”

After Adelaide had written and addressed this letter, she immediately despatched it by train to George at Oldcastle. Having arranged this matter she then sat down and copied Miss Williams's note to Sir Hugh, without, however, re-opening it, so deeply was each word imprinted on her memory. She then waited till the children had retired for the night, and quietly returned to the library, and replaced the original letter on the table where the servant had left it, and having done this sat there expecting her cousin's return, with the fiercest emotions struggling in her breast.

She however waited in vain. Sir Hugh had not come back when the old clock in the Hall struck one; and ashamed to sit up any longer Adelaide at last left the room, and went upstairs to her feverish rest.

A night's reflection nevertheless, and the know-

ledge, perhaps, that Sir Hugh might justly ask *her* what right she had to interfere in his private affairs, and open his letters, had somewhat, before she again met her cousin, changed and influenced her conduct. She did not, indeed she could not, meet him with the cordiality of old ; but Sir Hugh allowed her change of manner, apparently and really, to pass unnoticed, for he appeared at luncheon depressed and out of spirits, and scarcely answered, even when addressed by his favourite little Milly.

“Has George gone, or rather come down again?” was the only question he asked, adding presently—“By-the-bye, what a deuced bore ! I’ve forgotten to send the books down to Miss Williams that she wanted. I’ve lost the list too, I declare,” he said, putting his hands carelessly into his pockets, as if seeking for something ; and Adelaide sat and looked at him as he spoke, biting her red lips, and despising herself because she did not, could not, hate her cousin.

Oh ! what a long dull Sunday that was—a long dull, dreary day ! Other girls have loved and been unhappy ; but most of other girls, it is to be hoped, have been able to console themselves with—“He that I love at least is worthy ;” or it may be—“I have loved him at least worthily, unselfishly ;” but Adelaide Manners could do neither. She knew that Sir Hugh was a bad man—had known it for years ;

and she knew also that for her own sake, not for his, she had planned and schemed to be his wife. Yet she loved him—had learnt to love him with a passionate and fierce emotion, which seemed sometimes to her to be almost akin to hate. And as silent and indignant she sat that evening, shaded by the heavy window curtains, and watched his handsome face, on which the firelight flickered, she was asking herself with exceeding scorn, if it were the straight white features alone which had won her heart—which had destroyed her peace—"for what has he else?" she said, almost aloud—"for what has he else?"

"Adelaide, do you ever wish you were dead?" said Sir Hugh to her from his easy-chair by the fire, after not having addressed a single word to her for at least an hour.

"Yes—or that I had never been born," she answered, in the bitterness of her heart.

"But why? Come here, and be a little more sociable. What the deuce can make a girl like you wish you were dead?"

"What can make you?"

"A confounded feeling here that wont let me rest," answered Sir Hugh, in a manner and voice so unlike his own careless one, that Adelaide half started as he spoke.

"What sort of feeling?" she asked.

"A gnawing, cursed shame of oneself," said Sir Hugh, with savage energy. "By Jove, what a grand thing is human nature! Does any one trust in you, child? Is any one true to you? Then you'll deceive them—you'll break their hearts; but you and I aren't such fools, Adelaide—we are not fond loving fools, are we, my dear? We love ourselves too well for that—that is not our sort, is it?"

"What are you talking of Hugh?" said Adelaide, sternly. "What folly are you talking?"

"I was speculating on the folly of some natures. Do you know, Adelaide, I'm beginning to believe that some women actually do love men for themselves."

"And what did you think before, may I ask?"

"Come, don't you pretend you want teaching on such points. You know pretty well by this time how a fellow's purse, or name, or position affects you fair damsels when you bestow your affections. There aren't such things as priceless gifts of love, or faith, or tenderness to be had now-a-days in the world, and you know that very well, Miss Adelaide."

"I thought you said," retorted Adelaide, scornfully, "that you were beginning to believe in—what was it?—in women loving men for themselves?"

"Not in the world," answered Sir Hugh, turning away his head.

"Do you mean out of it then, pray?"

"I mean not in our world."

"May I ask what world you have found it in then?"

"It is folly such talk. You do not understand me, or of what I am thinking."

"Perhaps better than you think, Hugh," answered Adelaide, significantly; and then, after struggling for a moment with her pride, she came towards her cousin and stood beside his chair.

"Hugh," she said, in a trembling and broken voice, "we are old friends—at least old companions—my poor aunt——," then she stopped, for her voice failed her.

"What is it, Adelaide?" said Sir Hugh, kindly. "What is the matter with you, child?" and he took hold of her hand.

"Oh! pause Hugh," continued Adelaide, with much emotion, "pause before you are so mad—before you let a brief love—passion—whatever it is—destroy your whole life."

"Of what are you talking, Adelaide?" said Sir Hugh, very gravely. "What do you know?"

"I know she has deceived and trifled with poor George; I know he loves her, and that now she is ready to deceive and entangle you."

Sir Hugh gave a little laugh as Adelaide ended.

"Don't you take such folly into your head, child," he said. "So it's little Miss Williams

you're thinking of, is it? Make yourself easy, Adelaide, as I've told you before. She wont marry George, and, by Jove, I can promise you one thing, she wont marry me!"

"I cannot trust you," said Adelaide, bitterly; and pulling her hand from her cousin's, she left him without another word.

Sir Hugh sat almost without moving his attitude for nearly an hour after she was gone. Sat with his face leaning on his hand, and with remorse, affection, and some new and strangely awakened feelings struggling for mastery, in his cold and world-worn heart.

"Poor girl!" he said—"poor, poor loving little girl!" But he was not thinking of Adelaide Manners, nor yet of the fair delicate woman whose letter to him had caused her such passionate anger. He was thinking of "Pretty Peggy," the beautiful fisher-girl, who loved him, and whose blind devoted affection had touched some long forgotten tenderness, which yet against his will, had lingered in his breast.

"What cowards we are—what vile cowards!" he thought; "for I'll stab this little one who loves me, will I? for the sake of the sneering, mocking world, to whom my life here or hereafter will scarce afford a jest, or my death a sigh. My God, if what George Manners calls the awful truths of

eternity are real, how the great Master up there must laugh at us weak children of time."

The Hall clock struck ten, and Sir Hugh roused himself from his reverie, and looking at his watch, rose and went to the window. It was a wild and stormy night, with a half moon struggling overhead among masses of heavy, drifting clouds, and casting just then its fitful rays on the trees and shrubs around the Hall.

"When I am gone," said Sir Hugh, bitterly, to himself, "this will be all the same. My children, or George's will stand here—and I will be 'Old Sir Hugh'—or, 'that young scamp Sir Hugh, who died young,' on their tongues. I will be nothing; yet for them—and such as them—I am going to break poor Peggy's heart;" and with a sort of laugh he turned and left the room, and wrapping himself in his military cloak in the hall, and slouching a cap over his face, he opened the hall door, and went out into the night.

He crossed the country by the shortest way, and went down upon the sands, keeping close under the shelter of the links, and there—sitting "'mid the waste and lumber of the shore," was the young girl he had come to meet, and who, as he approached her, rose and held out to him her shapely brown hand.

"Well, Peggy, it's a wild night, child," said Sir Hugh.

"Ay," answered the girl, in a voice of much pathetic sweetness, and looking at him with her dark and earnest eyes.

"What does 'ay' mean?" said Sir Hugh, laying his hand lightly on her shoulder and smiling. "What does little ignoramus mean by *ay*?"

"I wish I wasn't ignorant," she answered, wistfully. "I wish—I wish——"

"Well, what Peggy?"

"I was like you, Hugh—like you," and she looked up into his face as she spoke with such tender, trustful love, that Sir Hugh dropped his eyes beneath hers with a sigh.

"Don't wish that Peggy—don't wish to be a sinner like me," he said.

"No, no, you're not. *You* a sinner!—you, who are so handsome, and so kind."

"You are a little flatterer."

"No, Hugh."

"By Jove, I believe you don't think so; but at all events, Peggy, you're a little fool."

"Yes—perhaps beside you."

"I don't mean that, child, I mean for loving me."

"How can I help it, Hugh? Who is there like you—and—and you know," she added softly, and caressingly, "you loved me a little first."

"I love you now, Peggy; believe that, at any rate; and if you would only be a wise little girl,

and let me do something for you, you would make me far happier."

"I don't want your money, or your gifts," said she, pushing him slightly away, as if he had hurt her.

"But what folly; it isn't me giving you anything. I love you child, and you've a right to it. I hate to think of my little Peggy working and toiling, when I have more than I know what well to do with."

"No Hugh, I can't, I can't, I can't."

"Well, don't distress yourself."

"I would work for you, I would toil for you, I would die for you!" said she, passionately; "but don't ask me to take anything from you. Oh, my darling, you don't guess such love as mine," she continued; "it wasn't, it wasn't—when I asked you the other night to wed me—for the world's sake; what is the world to me?—you are my world—but it was for God's."

"Hush, child, hush."

"Oh! look Hugh, when I kneel down at night and pray for my darling—let me ask for my *husband*—not that I want any one to know; oh! no, no, no! Do you think I would hurt you like that?—I know what you gentlefolk think of us; but I want *Him* to know; and then I'll bide all the sorrow, all the shame they can heap on my head."

"You don't mind what people say of you, then?"

"They have said their say," she answered, with some bitterness; "they have called me names, and mocked me on the roads; but what is that? Hugh! Hugh! your little finger is more to me than all the world beside."

"But what good would such a marriage do you?"

"This," said Peggy, solemnly; "that when you and I are called to that account we all must render, no sin may lie at your door—no sin on the poor lass who loves you so well."

"And you wish for no recognition, no rank?—you will be content to remain as you are?"

"Glad and joyful! Would I wrong you, do you think, my dear? I? No; it would wrong you for folks to know. I only mind for God and you."

"Well, we'll go over the Borders to be married, some fine morning," said Sir Hugh, lightly. "You can get married easily enough there, you know, Peggy; just jumping over a broomstick does it, I believe."

"Oh! Hugh, now."

"Well child, it does; or if I say: I, Hugh, take thee, Margaret—that's enough, really."

"Is it?" said the girl, innocently. "Well, that's easily said."

"Yes—make room for me there by you, child—yes: I, Hugh, take thee, Margaret, for better or for worse—is that it?" Yet sitting there, with her soft lovely cheek against his, and with hands tight clasped, Sir Hugh was true to his creed.

"I will see—I will try her," he was saying to his conscience; "this may be but pretty acting, like the rest. Wait till she thinks she has some right over me, and then—why then, by Jove! I'll show them all I too can prize a faithful little heart."

The moon came out, and shone upon their heads—on the girl's pure, beautiful face, and on Sir Hugh's handsome, passionate one. There was no human eye to see them; for far away, stretching out into dim distance before them, lay the long yellow sands; and farther, still farther, the wild blue sea. There was no human eye; but the One who could read the secrets of these two loving beating hearts, knew how much higher and nobler was the poor rude fisher-girl's than that of the well-descended gentleman by her side, who, even as he claspt her to his breast, was yet planning to deceive the trusting woman who loved him too well.

